

STREAM OF SHAPES:  
STRUCTURE IN TWO PLAYS BY JOSE TRIANA

By  
GUILLERMO G. PEREZ

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Council  
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By

Guillermo G. Pérez

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This study examines the elements of dramatic form in the one-act El Mayor General hablará de teogonía and in the full-length play La noche de los asesinos. The work establishes principles of structure in drama, surveying germane critical material and proceeding to apply guiding analytical concepts to the two plays, which are representative of contemporary Latin American theater. The elaboration of a methodic approach to dramatic texts thus draws and expands upon the writings of several theoreticians, beginning with a definition of the basic shaping units in a play and delineating their relationships. From minute linguistic phenomena such as verb forms to dialog patterns that show direction and cohesion in the interchange, verbal constructs reveal the mechanisms involved in all aspects of dramatic presentation, including characterization, plot, and themes. In El Mayor General . . ., important word forms, reiterated questions and commands, ellipses,

pauses, platitudes, and hyperbole, all constitute micro-structural elements. These are organized within a dialectic pattern that tends to deteriorate into alienating speech habits—an anti-dialectic process. In turn, dialog patterns in the one-act coalesce to form an overall structure marked by the building up of dramatic expectations and ending in the frustration of plot possibilities. In La noche . . ., the fundamental linguistic units are imperatives, interrogatives, commonplace and intensifying expressions, and hypnotic elements. Parody of social situations helps organize these minute expressive tendencies. The full-length play may be classified, according to its structure, as metatheatre, a philosophical type of drama. Ultimately, structural analysis of Triana's two works gives insight into the playwright's characteristic system of dramaturgy, the general principles of organization that determine the shape of his plays.

CHAPTER 1  
PRINCIPLES OF DRAMATIC STRUCTURE:  
A CRITICAL APPROACH

A study of structure in a dramatic text presents an unexpected challenge. At first it seems that the most accessible aspect of a play should be its structure. After all, this facet of drama, simply viewed, encompasses the components of presentation and their relationships—the building blocks of a work. Basically, then, structural analysis reveals what lies where in a play and how this affects development. As one plunges into critical tasks, however, the complexities of presence and placement of dramatic elements as determinants of progression in a play soon impose considerable demands on analytical approach. Most importantly, it becomes difficult to maintain integrity in theoretical abstractions without losing a grip on concrete manifestations of structural devices and forces. In dealing specifically with form in drama, moreover, there arises the problem of limited material for critical orientation. The search for useful background commentary turns out to be even more frustrating when the subject is a structure in works by a Latin American playwright.

The present study of structure in two plays by the Cuban author, José Triana, had to contend with these inherent difficulties. Before any examination of a specific work can take place, it seems first necessary to survey critical material that provides direction and guidelines for analysis. This structural investigation will draw from the ideas of

various critics and so eschew exclusive commitment to a particular set of observations. A practical series of concepts will be assembled—and expanded—in the hope of creating a fruitful approach to the plays under study.

In writing about structure, the initial task should be to define the basic components of presentation. In a performance of a play, the scenery, the lighting, the costumes, the acting, and the props would all contain structuring elements. When only the text of a play is being considered, however, the investigation remains limited to the essentials of dialog and to germane directorial comments by the author.

Frequently, the smallest structural unit is defined as an action in a play. The critic Jackson Barry, for instance, who concentrates on how reality undergoes rearrangement for dramatic presentation, focuses on events, units of "striving," as the digits that add up to the total dramatic shape. For Barry, what happens in the "ever-present now of immediate experience," including the smallest action, constitutes the form the playwright gives to a drama arising from his world-view—the portrayal of a set of possibilities in human life.<sup>1</sup>

When another critic, Bernard Beckerman, makes the statement, "the art of theater is the art of manipulating activity," we already suspect that for him, too, minute action constitutes the basis of structure.<sup>2</sup> This becomes certain later as he describes activity in drama as "a way of grouping motion into coherent units of time."<sup>3</sup> Although this is more abstract than Barry's comment, Beckerman defines the object of structural investigation clearly by asserting that "the elements of analysis aren't

plot and character but units of time: what occurs within these units and how they relate to one another."<sup>4</sup> A study of structure must then concern itself with meaningfully discrete units of activity. Beckerman states that these are composed of an agent and an action, which should be the subjects of examination.<sup>5</sup>

Considering the observations of these two critics, defining the basic structural components of drama as units of activity seems reasonable and practical. It is important to note, however, that in drama speech constitutes action. Applying Beckerman's definition, the basic building blocks of structure in drama emerge as units of verbal activity. They involve speaker (agent) and spoken line (action). This description seems especially appropriate for analysis of a text, the blueprint of dramatic speech. Conceivably, our definition can include wordless utterances and, if indicated in the text, non-oral sounds like the striking of props. On the other hand, we may adopt a wider focus when needed—a whole monolog, say, or a lengthy interchange among characters.

The concept of verbal units as the basic structuring elements can be further related to the comments of a critic like Thomas Van Laan who decides upon character groupings as the essential components of dramatic form.<sup>6</sup> For him, these constitute scenes—"any narrative unit that having its own beginning, middle, and end stands out in the over-all pattern as a self-contained sequence of incidents."<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein, Paul Levitt states: "Structure is the place, relation, and function of scenes in episodes and in the whole play."<sup>8</sup> Scene divisions, according to Levitt, are organic to a play when they arise from the entrance of a



character, as in the case of seventeenth-century French drama. Although in theory this critic advocates concentrating on extensive segments like the scene, in practice he is forced to consider smaller verbal units like recurring lines.<sup>9</sup>

As one considers how some critics define basic structural units in drama, a crucial concept comes to the foreground. To Beckerman, not only individual components but also the relationships among them are central to examination. Levitt, moreover, speaks of the proper subject of structural criticism as "the organization of a literary work—the relatedness of all the parts in the whole."<sup>10</sup> These critics rightly indicate that to discover the exact function of structuring elements, context must be kept in mind. Given the nature of drama, it is important to consider verbal segments not solely as separate entities but also as part of a continuum. Hence, besides the internal characteristics of a segment, its placement and textual bonds demand close attention. Clearly, the relationships that arise from the arrangement of verbal segments greatly help to determine the nature of a play.

Many critics expand upon the concept of relationship due to its importance in dramatic structure. In fact, the way they view linkage among structural units determines their metaphor for the abstract, over-all shape of plays. Beckerman, for instance, perceives units as fitting into one another with a nesting effect, similar to a set of Chinese boxes.<sup>11</sup> More common, however, is the image of concatenation. This appears in Barry when he speaks of drama as a perpetual now where one moment linked to another moves towards the future through a variety of

forces—a chain reaction.<sup>12</sup> According to Barry, structural studies should describe relationships among presentational elements as they arise and undergo adjustments throughout a play.

Paul Levitt, another critic concerned with the effect of drama's temporal nature on form, gives specific names to relative developments among structural units. He speaks at length, for instance, of continuation and closure. These strains, found in every segment (scenes to him), redefine the preceding content on the one hand and limit future developments on the other. The specific ways in which this happens include "recurrence" and "reversal." Each arises from different relationships among segments, respectively expanding or frustrating the established progression of form.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, a great variety of relationships can arise among structural components. The observations of various critics point to the most common of these. The terms used for general types of structural relationships often evoke musical form. Dramatic segments are said to relate to one another in counterpoint, as variations on a theme, as leit-motifs. Jackson Barry even considers the similarities between music and drama through a detailed study of parallel compositional elements in the score and the libretto of an opera by Mozart.<sup>14</sup>

As the focus on dramatic works widens, each series of relationships among basic structural units begins to fall into larger patterns. One may consider, for example, a sequence of contrapuntal verbal strains that, recurring throughout a play, would establish a dialectical pattern; this, in fact, is what generally occurs in thesis plays where antithetical

ideas assigned to conflicting characters move towards synthesis through counterpoised verbal segments. Many other patterns, however, can emerge.

Different critics regard extended dramatic shapes in varying ways. Considering actions as the basic structural units, Barry naturally characterizes a series of organized events and natural phenomena—meals, parties, contests, storms, visits, etc.—as forming "a retrospective temporal pattern" that organizes a large part of a play.<sup>15</sup> More abstractly, Barry speaks of expectation and fulfillment, trial and adjustment, as examples of kinetic patterns that shape extensive portions in dramas.<sup>16</sup>

For Bernard Beckerman, structural units give rise to recurrent sequences, characterized as active or reactive; the former involve confrontation, the latter entail exposition—of past experiences, private thoughts, hidden emotions. Both types of sequences affect the direction of the play. Active segments move towards a goal, tending to redefine the established relationship among structural units. Reactive segments, on the other hand, generally serve to expand or emphasize the given relationships, adding dimension to drama.<sup>17</sup> To put Beckerman's concept in more concrete terms, it can be related to our view of structural components as verbal units. A particular character, for instance, may give self-justifying speeches throughout a play; this "reactive pattern" may be balanced with his intermittent clashes with other speakers, "active segments" that could negate, cast doubt on, or show flaws in the reactive speeches. Conversely, of course, active segments may help to validate previous assertions. Whatever pattern emerges—contradictory or

affirmative—would reveal the author's rhetorical leanings towards characters. Such a play would probably be structured on a developing pattern of characterization.

Indeed, the principal designs in a play coalesce into what can be called the supra-structure, the over-all pattern in a work. The traditional names given to different types of drama indicate respective supra-structures. In the example proposed above, the over-all patterns would principally serve to reveal the nature of individual personalities and so would give rise to the supra-structure of a typical character play. In similar ways, dramas concerned with social causes, philosophical issues, or the manners of a period would have concomitant supra-structures—arising from a series of dialectical encounters, say, or a string of typifying scenes. The more generally these all-embracing patterns are defined, the more applicable they are to a variety of plays.

In Bernard Beckerman's observations, we find a clear illustration of how the essential nature of a play may be defined through its supra-structure. Beckerman describes two modes of drama, the intensive and the extensive. These contain supra-structures that are respectively characterized by compactness and dispersement, singularity and variety, horizontal and vertical development, mainly active and reactive segments. The features of each mode depend on the kinds of actions in a play—their frequency and manner.<sup>18</sup>

In Paul Levitt's study, the points of attack, early or late, are seen as the primary determinants of over-all patterns in drama. Levitt is merely referring to the beginning of a play when he talks about a

point of attack. In fact, the types of supra-structures associated with plays that open early or late on dramatic developments resemble those assigned by Beckerman to the extensive and intensive modes. Basically, one would involve progression through linear unfolding, the other intensification through concentrated revelation and accentuation.<sup>19</sup> Like Beckerman and Levitt, Jackson Barry describes general dramatic designs, but he simply refers to a "basic pattern of events" for his labels.<sup>20</sup> Thus, he offers a journey, a rise to power, a downfall, and so forth, as types of supra-structure. Barry insists that "the locus of the relating and ordering principle of drama would be found in a pattern of the major developments of a series of events."<sup>21</sup> These events add up to a sweeping process that carries all dramatic details in its wake. It should be noted that this view of dramatic form is not easily adaptable to the less traditional types of plays.

The way that dramatic patterns arise and coalesce into a total structure can be influenced by many shaping forces. Political ideology, poetic concerns, psychological observations can all come into play. These would operate on the thematic plane. Moreover, principles that determine placement and govern progression would remain essential to the formation of a drama. These would function on the locutionary plane. Shaping forces can embrace a whole play or just operate briefly at a subordinate level. They sometimes work as guiding abstractions but may also be very concrete devices. For instance, a thesis play would be ordered by a general dialectic view of a human problem but would also bear the influence of rhetorical schemes. Critical attention, then,

should be paid to major and minor, abstract and concrete, formative presences in drama.

The comments of two critics can illustrate the workings of shaping forces. Jackson Barry, for whom actions constitute basic structural units, predictably sees the playwright's assumptions about reality as the basis of any formative principle.<sup>22</sup> A process of selection among experiences therefore sets the ultimate boundaries and maps out the interior of a play. Throughout the developments of a drama, Barry identifies an "improvisational structural force," which in a perpetual now links one moment to another, moving towards an uncertain future.<sup>23</sup> By improvisation—a term which can be misleading—Barry simply means the illusion of spontaneity in drama. At each step in a play, he likes to characterize elements which relate action to action (or if we think of verbal units, speech to speech). For instance, he identifies differences among speakers as prime movers that can trace a pattern of trial and adjustment.<sup>24</sup> The observations of Bernard Beckerman offer more on the subject of structural determinants. From his point of view, portioned activity—the basis of dramatic form—reveals the playwright's perspective on reality; choice of detail and manner of reenactment fundamentally determine the shapes of plays. Several factors affect the relationship of a play to reality. Beckerman mentions proportion and depth; the former determines to what degree activity is magnified or minimized in a portrayal, and the latter depends on the implications that grow out of that activity.<sup>25</sup> The critic goes on to identify causation as the basic determinant of segmental inter-dependence. The causative link can be

characterized by qualities like compactness (tight or loose sequences), specificity (particular or general causes), and perceptibility (expressed or covert causation).<sup>26</sup> These terms are especially useful in the analysis of dramatic coherence.

In view of all the preceding observations, it becomes apparent that the basic tasks of a structural study involve identification and description. These procedures should delineate the exact nature of structure in a play, revealing placement and function of formative components and tracing their relationships. Thus, major dramatic patterns can be discerned. Ultimately, then, the total structure of a play emerges as a supra-pattern, the complex sum of subordinate shapes. As verbal segments comprise the basic components of structure, linguistic units and patterns will naturally remain in focus at all times. The dynamics, coherence, and direction of a work are thus always viewed in relation to language. This is not to say that other formative factors—politics, psychology, aesthetics, etc.—should not be considered. Yet these will be of interest only as tributaries of linguistic substance in drama.

A few comments still need to be made regarding the relationship between the structuralist school of criticism and the ideas that inform this study. If, as Robert Scholes points out, the "perception of order or structure where only undifferentiated phenomena had seemed to exist before is the distinguishing characteristic of structuralist thought,"<sup>27</sup> then the work of Beckerman, Barry, and Levitt, while not adhering strictly to any particular school of thought, certainly shares structuralism's analytical tendency in concentrating on the workings of presentational elements. Moreover, considering how the roots of structuralism

lie in Saussurean linguistics, our definition of the basic components of drama as verbal units ties the ensuing analysis with a fundamental structuralist concern with the peculiarities of language, especially as a growing organism. Unfortunately, few works of structuralist criticism are dedicated solely to drama; the writings of Etienne Souriau, however, deserve mention. For the most part, his studies entailed the abstraction of formal patterns from a body of plays, a valuable way of showing common dramatic mechanisms under superficial differences of plot and character. Scholes asserts that maybe "because the structuralists have somewhat neglected dramatic literature as a whole, Souriau's work, while acknowledged, has yet to receive all the recognition it deserves."<sup>28</sup> Although no direct use is made here of the dramatic functions and configurations proposed by Souriau, his ability to look through particular elements and perceive essential formations should remain an inspiration.

Having laid the critical foundation of this study, we should now proceed to the application of theory to specific works. By drawing from and expanding on the ideas of the previously examined critics, we will examine the means of presentation in the one-act El Mayor General hablará de teogonía and in the full-length play La noche de los asesinos. Since the basic constituents of structure have been defined as verbal units, significant linguistic manifestations, from individual words to long sequences of dialog, will occupy our critical attention. The first task in dealing with each play involves the delineation of major internal boundaries. Once these are established, we should gain an impression of the general progression of the drama. The details of presentation may



then be examined. These micro-structural elements embrace words and phrases arranged in meaningful patterns through reiteration. The identification of units, their placement and relationship, should reveal function and significance. The study also demands a wider perspective. Word/phrase arrangements should be viewed within dialog patterns. Where these larger verbal units are concerned, dynamics and direction comprise the subject of analysis. Beyond, there lie the macro-structural elements—the over-all patterns—that most obviously reflect the basic nature of a play, its thematic and aesthetic essence. In relation to this, we may define a supra-structure, the verbal network comprised by the interlocking formative elements. All the steps in the critical approach will be clarified in concrete application.

It is important to point out that deliberate delimitation is an essential characteristic of this study. An examination of structure should be exhaustive, highly concentrated, and inclusive of all types of presentational elements in a work. In short, the object here is in-depth acquaintance rather than extensive investigation. Choosing the plays to be examined, therefore, required discrimination within the area of interest, contemporary Cuban drama. As an outstanding figure in Latin American theater, José Triana seems especially well suited for the proposed study. Among his works, La noche de los asesinos (1965) has become representative of modernistic Hispanic plays and therefore deserves special attention. It will be even more revealing to consider this full-length work, the author's most mature and felicitous creation, with El Mayor General hablará de teogonía (1960), Triana's first published play. The

dramas show somewhat similar tendencies, yet as works of different lengths from diametric periods they provide good sources for comparison. Beyond illustrating dramatic theory and giving insights into the craft of an important playwright, it is hoped that this study may contribute to the groundwork for future detailed analysis of dramatic structure in other plays.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Jackson G. Barry, Dramatic Structure: The Shaping of Experience (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1970), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Bernard Beckerman, Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas F. Van Laan, The Idiom of Drama (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 227.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>8</sup>Paul M. Levitt, A Structural Approach to the Analysis of Drama (The Hague: Mouton and Company, 1971), p. 16.

<sup>9</sup>This holds true in the second section of the book, where the critic applies his concepts to the analysis of a play.

<sup>10</sup>Levitt, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup>Beckerman, pp. 38-43.

<sup>12</sup>Barry, p. 42.

<sup>13</sup>Levitt, pp. 53-61.

<sup>14</sup>Barry, pp. 132-52.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 70-80.

<sup>17</sup>Beckerman, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 188-192.

<sup>19</sup>Levitt, pp. 29-33.

<sup>20</sup>Barry, p. 26.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>25</sup>Beckerman, pp. 28-29.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 175-176.

<sup>27</sup>Robert Scholes, Structuralism in Literature (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 41.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

## CHAPTER 2 EL MAJOR GENERAL HABLARA DE TEOGONIA

### Introduction

A structural analysis of El Mayor General hablará de teogonía offers a good introduction to formal tendencies in the dramatic art of José Triana. As the playwright's first work, this play lets us see the types of elements and arrangements that characterize his early structural concerns. Indeed, we find in the one-act "una gran parte de los elementos seminales que componen su dramaturgia," as Román Vito de la Campa asserts.<sup>1</sup> El Mayor General . . . provides a compact subject for study and still allows for later comparison with the extended form of a full-length play by Triana. After discovering the structural characteristics of a short work, we may then go on to find parallels and differences in a more complex dramatic network; thus, constant features in Triana's dramaturgy would be revealed along with structural variations arising from the demands of duration.

Our examination of El Mayor General . . . will be guided by the introductory discussion about structural principles. Having defined verbal units as the basic constituents of structure, we must pay attention to dramatic elements of varying lengths, from individual words to long dialog segments. First of all, however, delineation of major structural boundaries within the play must take place. Once these are established, we can examine in detail all significant micro-structural elements.

Identification of structural units and description of their function remain the principal tasks. Afterwards, a wider focus will reveal relationships among formative elements that give rise to over-all dramatic patterns. Ultimately, the whole analytical process should help clarify how structure affects the fundamental nature of El Mayor General . . . .

What determines the major divisions within a dramatic continuum varies somewhat from play to play and also depends upon critical perspective. Paul Levitt seems right in viewing the entrance of a character as an indicator of a new structural phase in a play.<sup>2</sup> Although our study concentrates on developments among verbal segments, his idea is still applicable. The introduction of an additional voice into the linguistic fabric of a play redefines relationships among the structural components present and may create a notable change in dramatic shape. To consider entrances as the only determinant of major boundaries, however, seems insufficient. Within the same group of speakers—or even throughout the course of one speech—there can occur significant verbal phenomena, important enough to indicate a new development in the course of a play and thus signaling a new structural phase. For instance, a principal segment may cover the span of an argument between characters already in a scene, from an initial aggressive comment, say, to words of reconciliation or separation. Much more subtly, the direction of a play may be altered by adjustments in a character's state of mind during a monolog. Although this latter possibility rarely would create major divisions in lengthy, well-populated plays, one-character dramas would be structured

precisely on such recondite occurrences. As we look for major structural boundaries in El Mayor General . . ., different types of divisions, whether created by entrances or by shifts in dialog, need to be considered.

First of all, mindful of critics who espouse the supremacy of dramatic events in the formation of structure, we should first consider the elements of plot. El Mayor General . . . deals with the internecine struggles within a family of three—two sisters, Elisiria and Petronila, and the latter's husband, Higinio—whose present existence is haunted by a mysterious crime and encumbered by a strange relationship to a powerful landlord, the eponymous general. The play is set on the day of the married couple's wedding anniversary; hence, familial conflicts show through the frenzy of preparations, as all await the arrival of the general, the guest of honor. Save for a few outbursts of agitated activity—setting the table, playing records, and dancing, etc.—the affair seems rather static. The true liveliness of the play lies in the flights, eruptions, and clashes in the dialog, which reinforces our intent to concentrate on verbal units. Although the party ostensibly serves to provide what Jackson Barry calls "the basic pattern of events,"<sup>3</sup> the lack of harmony and continuous cacophony create a heavily charged atmosphere that ironically figures as the opposite of celebration. The gathering, instead of exemplifying familial unity, displays the process of the group's disintegration.

In determining the major boundaries of Triana's one-act play, special elements in the text demand consideration. Throughout the course of the drama, we should pick out indications that significant developments

are about to take place. As should be expected, the entrance of a voice marks an alternation in structural arrangements. However, even with the same group of speakers, there also appear divisional verbal elements that signal the end of a dramatic segment and the start of another. In El Mayor General . . ., this can occur unequivocally. Lines of dialog will often terminate discussion sharply and either strain towards a new interchange or lead to a pause, which makes silence part of structural division. After demarcation, a distinct segment should follow, containing further development in dramatic progression. These segments may amplify themes, fix characterization, delineate situations, create atmosphere, and so forth. Indeed, they may have a singular or a multiple function. Although developments within major internal boundaries comprise discrete units, they often involve reiterated shaping devices that make for unity in the over-all presentation. Bearing all these criteria in mind, we can readily delineate the primary verbal sequences in the play.

If we adhere strictly to Levitt's concept of the scene, El Mayor General . . . would contain only three major segments. The initial scene, involving Petronila and Elisiria, takes up about half of the play, during which time one of the characters is occasionally and briefly left alone. A major division would arise with Higinio's arrival (p. 337).<sup>4</sup> The long, second scene follows with only the family members—further showing conflicts, exposing the past—until the entrance, towards the end of the play, of the major general (p. 350). The introduction of this character marks the start of the concluding segment, a short and climactic scene.

Although the above segments are indeed significant, settling on only these turns out to be inadequate. Far too many verbal developments occur within the long scenes for us to ignore further partitioning. We must then consider subtler shifts in the dialog. To reiterate, delineated segments must have definite boundaries marked by linguistic indicators and must possess cohesiveness, contributing uniquely to the progress of the play.

From the time El Mayor General . . . opens to Higinio's entrance, dramatic focus moves from one sister to the other. Throughout this section, three principal phases can be perceived. The first and the second contribute mostly informative material: revelatory and conflictive lines that add dimension and charge the presentation. The third segment emerges as a reprise. Segments one and two may be called the entrapment and the preparation sequences, labels that indicate the dramatic phenomena within. The appropriateness of each tag will be shown in close analysis. Following these three segments, Higinio's appearance initiates a section that can also be subdivided. Here, in symmetry with the previous scene, the verbal flow similarly undergoes three distinctive phases. The first two help expand material in the play, while the last winds up by gathering previously developed elements in the presentation, a second reprise.<sup>5</sup>

In the sections that include Higinio, there naturally emerge new perspectives due to the additional voice and changes in focus. Yet, as we will clearly see later on, due to the harmonious unfolding of structure, the segments within the second scene extend in neat arrangement the



essential characteristics of the previous parts. We may label Higinio's sections before the reprise as the murder plan and guilty memory segments. Again, the central concerns of the determinant verbal units are thus designated.

Unlike the previous, longer scenes, the concluding section of El Mayor General . . .—initiated by the general's entrance and given final punctuation by his last speech—figures as a single, major unit. Although specific developments within it still need to be singled out, the brevity and uniformity of the scene do not call for subdivision. The finer details in the progression of this last stretch will be discussed when we consider micro-structural elements. This third and final segment of El Mayor General . . . remains dominated by the general. Besides containing the climax of the play, the segment also serves other structural purposes. In a brief, rapid manner, the last segment resumes and summarily reemphasizes the themes and conflicts that charge the whole play; this parallels, in the total structure, each reprise that punctuates the preceding scenes. Moreover, beyond recapitulation, the final section has the important function of putting previous dramatic material suddenly into a new perspective. Ideas and attitudes presented by the family members are contradicted or diminished by the new strain in the verbal fabric, the general's voice.

Naturally, this over-all description of the divisions in the play and their content will be substantiated by our study. We must first concentrate on the micro-structural elements, identifying, analyzing, and relating verbal units. From words and phrases to dialog patterns,

the fundamental characteristics of structure will emerge. Eventually, over-all traces by the components of the micro-structure give rise to the comprehensive design of the play. Therein will lie the essential nature of Triana's work.

### Verb Forms

As we examine micro-structural elements in El Mayor General . . ., many types of words and constructions emerge as primary determinants of the play's verbal fabric. These include special forms of diction and grammar that, reiterated in various contexts, come to establish characterization, conflicts, themes, and other dramatic constituents. Among structural units, a series of significant verb forms seems most prominent. The past, the future, and the conditional are used especially to present the central situation and to delineate characters according to their views on previous events and prospects. From the first segment, where basic circumstances begin to be revealed, to the last, climactic scene, special verb forms constitute a cohesive strand, consistently bearing upon the nature of the drama.

The opening section of the play, the short "entrapment segment," indeed derives its label from the predominant role of meaningful verb forms therein. Henceforth in the work, important themes—of limitation and hopelessness—arise in conjunction with the past, the future, and the conditional forms of verbs, as characters and situation continue to be developed. The very first lines of the initial segment already strike a major chord: "Sí, ¿por qué pones esa cara? Pudimos habernos ido pasados ya los primeros días de la convalecencia. Verdad es que hace

mucho. Pero fuiste tú quien empezó con tus quejas sentimentales. . . . Y aquí nos tienes. Esclavizados. Esclavizados sin remedio" (p. 319).<sup>6</sup> Here, Elisiria's attitude remains central to the segment and retains primary importance throughout the play, thus meriting a closer look.

The past takes a special form in the phrase, "Pudimos habernos ido"; this preterite complemented by a perfect infinitive denotes frustrated possibility instead of completed action. Then, the past participle, "esclavizados," used as predicate adjective, shows a definitive condition, the result of some obscure event. The regret in these lines keeps echoing later, emphasizing the burden of the past. In a typical subsequent statement, Elisiria insists, "no debimos entrar en esta casa; y si entramos . . . era urgente la salida . . . no debimos demorarnos tanto" (p. 320). Regret about not taking action is accompanied by criticism of what did occur: "Fue un paso demasiado comprometedor. Luego vinieron las complicaciones," Elisiria goes on mumbling, still without clarifying (p. 320). Even when the dialog seems to have taken a different turn, she persists, "Pudimos desviar el camino. No llegar hasta aquí. Hubiera sido mejor" (p. 321). Appearing towards the end of the first segment, this line harks back to the initial regret accentuated by bitterness over the loss of a better life.

In contrast to the embittered attitude displayed by Elisiria, another manifestation of the past evokes a vague, edenic period. Petronila remembers: "Antes yo miraba mis peces de colores y jugaba con los soldaditos de plomo y el mar cantaba a lo lejos" (p. 319). The reiteration of the -aba endings has a palliative effect, helping to

establish an adagio rhythm and nostalgic tone. By referring to a previous privileged state, the lines give mythic depth to the family situation, now afflicted by a fall from grace. Even Elisiria tries to seek some relief from the present by wistfully recalling, "Antes oíamos el canto de los pájaros. . . . Antes no sabíamos nada de nada y menos aún del orden y las leyes" (p. 320). Reminiscent of Biblical terms, suffering is associated with a gaining of knowledge—though this immediately takes on social significance with the mention of regulations.

The special use of the past covers just one aspect of the entrapment theme. Not only do structural elements suggest preceding action that weighs down on the present but they also portray a future devoid of better possibilities. The trap of current conditions thus seems inescapable. This unfortunate state is mostly drawn up through the appearance of future forms in conjunction with negation or as weakened affirmations. Such shaping units serve to delineate the dramatic situation further and to set the characters more firmly according to their stance.

Early in the segment, Elisiria expresses the hopelessness of the family predicament: "Nunca podremos salir de aquí" (p. 320). Within the general misfortune, she lives under the personal cloud of her mother's dark prognostication, "Esa niña nunca conocerá la felicidad" (p. 321). Beyond circumstances, then, adversity appears tied to a defeatist personality. Similarly, Petronila also fails to project towards a brighter future even though she opposes her sister's complaints. By not recognizing a past mistake and refraining from reproach, Petronila surrenders

to the status quo; she conforms to the present and tries to be unconcerned about the future. She counters Elisiria's comments with lines like "Y si fuera como tú dices, qué más da" (p. 320). Later, trying to formulate a course of action, Petronila's phrase remains incomplete—"yo haré . . ."—as her cynical companion interrupts, "Nada vas a hacer. Eres una calamidad" (pp. 321-322). Whether through a lack of promise or through ineffectiveness, then, the current oppressive situation will stay unchanged.

The importance of the verb forms we have examined lies not only in their shaping of the first segment but continues throughout the play, contributing further to the presentation of characters and to the development of situation. Whereas in the entrapment segment references to an onerous past and suggestions for future action remained vague, these undergo subsequent clarification; the structural process recalls Martin Esslin's comment that the "creation of interest and suspense (in their widest sense) . . . underlies all dramatic construction."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, verbal elements in the opening section collaborate to portray an oppressive existence marked by internecine tensions, yet the paucity of exact information urges us forward in search of illuminating details.

The continuous appearance of significant verb forms develops the attitudes and themes associated with them from the start and provides coherence among different phases of the drama. In the second section, for example, as a counterpoint to Petronila's enthusiastic preparations for the party, her sister stays distant, expressing preoccupations in asides like, "Yo hubiera preferido . . ." (p. 328); this fragment echoes

previous expressions of frustrated desire. Soon, she adds: "No debimos entrar," a phrase that keeps the theme of regret in the background. The yearning for a change shows up in the vague consideration of decisive action, "Si pudiéramos hacer algo . . ." (p. 332). Thus, while the central activity of the segment entails a willingness to celebrate the family situation, Elisiria's abstentions provide an undertow of discontent that makes for dramatic tension. This shows how an "intermediate pattern of events," temporary shaping activity as described by Jackson Barry, can be complemented, acquiring its full structural role only in relation to secondary formal elements.<sup>8</sup>

As the play advances, in the murder plan and memory segments, the special verb forms that temporarily indicated dissent from involvement with the present again gain prominence as the primary structural elements. The "murder plan segment" includes an accumulation of future and conditional constructions that propose liberating action. In this section, after having identified the general's tyrannical hold on the family as principal cause of their misery, Elisiria and Higinio proceed to devise a method for his demise. The discussion ensues with Higinio's decisive statement, "Lo mataremos," backed up by his sister-in-law: "Sería la mejor salida" (p. 339). A contrast arises with previous verb forms tinged by uncertainty. However, determination about committing the murder soon suffers a challenge from the doubting Petrolina. "Si lo matamos," she wonders, "¿Qué podemos hacer?" (p. 341). This sets up a tension that perpetuates the polarization of the sisters in the first segment; as the main generating force of the murder plan section,

orchestration of and opposition to the homicide warrants a detailed examination.

Following the first moment of verve, Elisiria continues to express with great determination the need to kill the general, elaborating the plan with sinister zest. Petronila's horror increases just as Higinio becomes more engrossed in the project described by his sister-in-law: "Debemos emplear un cuchillo bien grande. . . . Rodará su cabeza. . . . Su sangre nos servirá de alimento. Seremos santificados después" (pp. 339-340). The grotesque quality of these lines is shockingly tied to religious imagery, transforming an act of violence into a rite of purification. Thus, familial circumstances continue to be projected onto a metaphysical plane.

As the murder plan is unfolded, the proposed means of homicide has to be altered to accommodate Higinio's weaker disposition. The knife is substituted for a poison. Elisiria still savors the new proposal: "Yo trataré de administrarle, sin que se de cuenta, uno de sus brebajes venenosos. . . . Iré hasta su cuarto. Le robaré algún frasco de los que tieme lacrados" (p. 340). She keeps insisting on extreme action: "Le mataremos. Arrastraremos su cuerpo hasta dejarlo destrozado. Con las uñas cavaré un gran foso. Luego lo enterraremos en aquel campo" (p. 341). All the while, Higinio's comments are limited to rapid agreement; for example, he concurs, "Perfecto" (p. 340) and "Bien dicho" (p. 341). By showing such aggressive decisiveness—in marked contrast to earlier vague longings—Elisiria turns into a magnetic speaker, pulling Higinio towards violence. Thus, the murder plan—presented in

long, imaginative descriptions accompanied by short, concordant lines—helps delineate character. Elisiria emerges as the forceful leader, and Higinio as a willing but weaker accomplice. Moreover, beyond serving to differentiate the speakers' attitudes, verbal elements here create a sort of incantation that perpetuates and intensifies emotions demanding resolution through a violent act. Following Elisiria's feverish schemes, there comes an entranced exchange that shows diabolical communion; she says, "Jugaremos al crimen," and Higinia responds, "Seremos felices"; soon he reasserts, "Lo mataremos y nada más," and Elisiria emphasizes, "Lo mataremos" (p. 342). These verbs, reiterated for mutual assurance, convey the characters' new-found decisiveness, born from their inebriation with the thought of violence as an ultimate solution.

Even with the sequence of future tenses that strengthen the murder conspiracy, occasional lines militate against the drive towards violence. Petronila counters the spell-binding propositions of her companions with warnings like "Fíjate, fíjate bien, que vendrán los policías, y harán investigaciones y entonces sí que ya no podremos salir nunca de aquí. Y los vecinos meterán los ojos y la lengua" (p. 342). While the others celebrate the prospect of liberation, Petronila brings up the question of guilt in horrified detail—"Te mancharás las manos de sangre" (p. 342). The same verbal construction is thus used to present opposite perspectives, maintaining dramatic vehicles. Consequently, there are moments when the conspirators' certainty waivers. Elisiria wonders, "¿Nos salvaremos? ¿Podremos huir? Hay que preparar las maletas y sacar los pasajes para el primer tren de la madrugada" (p. 340). Pressed



to talk about the future, Higinio vacillates, "No sé, no sé bien ahora" (p. 341); later, he echoes the phrase when Petronila prods him to define freedom: "No sé . . ." (p. 343).

In the murder plan segment, the juxtaposition of speculative verb tenses further serves to differentiate attitudes and increase tension among characters. Petronila, for instance, in her dreamy manner, still yearns for regression to an edenic period, hating to have her illusion spoiled by violence; she says, "Yo hubiera querido jugar algún día con los soldaditos de plomo. Como antes" (p. 342). Her sister continues the strain but for an opposite reason: "Si no hubiera sido por él . . . yo a estas horas sería feliz. Me hubiera casado. Y quizás hubieran llegado los niños. Pero él es el culpable" (p. 342). For Elisiria, the speculation serves to attenuate guilt as she justifies the need for violence. Once more, despite different postures, the similarity in expression shown by shared verbal constructions reveals equally driven personalities. Obsessed with lost possibilities, each sister moves to encourage or resist violent action according to her individual nature.

The section of the play that follows the murder plan segment offers a structural complement to the proposals for future action. When Elisiria begins to relate a dark incident in the past, the dominant theme of the memory segment emerges immediately: "Veinticinco años. Hace veinticinco años . . . mi hermana quiso coger unas amapolas. El barro mojado. Se inclinó, allí. . . . Yo solté sus manos húmedas que me lastimaban. Luego oímos un grito. Intentamos hacer algo, pero no pudimos. La encontramos bañada en sangre . . . muy pálida. . . . Y él

estaba allí. Yo lo sé. Fue él quien me metió aquella idea" (p. 343).

The phrases remain brief, fragmented, creating a sort of narrative mosaic, and the preterite predominates; thus, the passage has a dramatic terseness that is consonant with Elisiria's grim remembrance. Her re-introduction of the dark incident, coming after chilling off-stage sounds, though sudden, is not gratuitous. It grows out of and gives dimension to her belligerent attitude. Indeed, the whole memory ends up as a justification for violence against the general as she again lays on him the blame for the family situation. Elisiria concludes, "Tenemos que deshacernos de él" (p. 343).

The memory serves to establish a new segment where past constructions predominate while remaining tied to the preceding sections' main concerns. Hence, even though a series of perspectives on the past primarily shapes the segment, the topic of murder extends through the opening interchange between Petronila and her husband and in occasional reiterations of the call for violence. As Petronila continues to argue against homicide, her words embrace the past through mention of a dead daughter; the baby becomes a symbol of an idealized home life. "Te olvidas de nuestra pequeña muñeca," she reproaches her husband, "Mírala. Dormida entre cristales. Como una reinecita. Ahora precisamente, podría jugar con los soldaditos de plomo" (p. 344). This contrasts with Elisiria's terse statements. Petronila refers to the dark incident obliquely by mentioning the aborted offspring in a tenseless construction; this emphasizes the constant presence of an event that changed family life. The concluding conditional phrase further shows frustration

in the lost possibility of parental joy, which for Petronila would have entailed a sort of regression to her own childhood.

Besides mentioning the daughter, Petronila touches upon another part of the past, also associated with the yearning for familial integrity:

La casa está llena de invitados. Los amigos de papá, el marqués y su sobrina, el telegrafista, el contable, el jefe, el señor Pomarrosa y el administrador de la casa de pompas fúnebres. Pero hay uno . . . allí, junto a la escalera, que está muy solo y triste. . . . Como un gatito. You avanzo entonces. El entonces se adelanta. Lo mira. ¿Fue hermoso nuestro encuentro? ¿Cuánto tiempo hace? (pp. 244-345)

Here, Petronila focuses attention on the relationship with her husband as she attempts to counteract the bitter drive towards violence through pleasant memories, thus perpetuating the dream of domestic cheer. The use of the present tense in describing the meeting indicates her strong desire to conjure up vividly their original attraction, yet unspoiled by disappointment. Moreover, since the husband sits apart from the crowd, Petronila's going towards him represents a way of extricating herself from the parental household; this makes marriage a sort of salvation for Petronila, giving motivation to her anxious desire to maintain the family situation, however flawed.

The two sisters, then, in their individual ways present and employ memory sequences, which helps to draw contrasting characterization. In fact, after their early lines in the segment, Petronila and Elisiria keep showing the same tendency to protect or disrupt the household, respectively. Threatened by the plotting allies, Petronila bewails the possible loss of her household illusion: "Un crimen. Ya no

tendremos ángeles. Ya no tendremos fábulas" (p. 346). Elisiria, on the other hand, occasionally reiterates key points in the description of the dark incident. "Recuerda," she says to Higinio; "Caminábamos, la madrugada, los trinos y el barro" (p. 347). She adds later, "La puerta estaba abierta, y el Mayor General en lo alto de la escalera. Fue solícito. Nos habló de muchas cosas" (p. 348). This serves to intensify the memory through a hypnotic rhythm that draws the listener close to the obsessed view of the past.

Higinio also contributes to the presentation of background information in this segment. Beyond just sharing Elisiria's perspective, he provides a surprising revelation. As Higinio intones what seems like an incantation, we anticipate communion in memory, the catalyst of violence. Yet the chant—"Veinticinco años, veinticinco años, veinticinco años, hace veinticinco años . . ."—concludes unexpectedly: "te quise matar" (p. 347). This represents the sort of structural technique Esslin refers to as "tactical"; tension rises as the drama seems to move towards an acute point, and then a sudden twist provides an unexpected development that changes relationships among the characters and gives a new perspective on the plot.

Higinio's confession leads towards his own memory sequence. This passage partially responds to the previous stretches of dialog that urge the husband to remember and to share one of the women's views on the family situation. Yet, at the same time, Higinio's words come to supplement and even oppose the perspective of both companions. While he does admit

to some affection for his wife—"mi dulce pajarito"—and to yearnings for fatherhood—"me llegó ilusionar, la llegada de mi hijo"—Higinio does not borrow Petronila's rose-colored glasses to view their marriage. As he says, "me casé sin saber cómo. Y vinieron los contratiempos, la búsqueda de un empleo, las nuevas amistades, los encargos . . ." (p. 348). He also shows resentment towards Elisiria, whose disruptiveness he recognized and even attempted to avoid. "Tú estabas allí, allí, allí," Higinio accuses his sister-in-law; he also remembers having urged his wife, "Olvídate de ella. Vámonos de esta casa" (p. 348).

Eventually, Higinio's independent declarations undergo attenuation and his individuality fades once more into Elisiria's perspective. He comes to recall his own disruptive role in the household: "Hacíamos locuras. (Ríe armagamente.) Era divertido, ¿verdad?" (p. 348). The segment goes full circle when he finally shares in the memory of the dark incident: "El barro estaba mojado. Ibas junto a mí. El barro estaba mojado, había una solución. Un golpe rápido y cayó ella" (p. 348). Whereas for Elisiria recalling the event becomes part of the invective against the general, for Higinio thoughts of that night lead to confusion and regret; he breaks down, "No sé. No sé, por qué hablo estas cosas. Luego, luego llegamos aquí. . . . La sangre, la sangre, y mi niña muerta" (p. 348). Higinio's repulsion towards blood prepares for his hesitation about committing a violent act. Unmoved, Elisiria refuses to admit guilt, insisting on her grievance against their landlord: "La puerta estaba abierta, y el Mayor General en lo alto de la escalera. . . . Nos había metido en una trampa. Y hemos sido sus víctimas" (p. 348).

In a segment where the characters' relation to the past remains a constant shaping element, the concluding stretch of dialog appropriately gathers their different perspectives on the family history that so onerously affects the present. As we have seen, Higinio and Elisiria express characteristic points of view, one irresolute, the other obsessed. Petronila also speaks her mind succinctly towards the end of the interchange, "Yo pensaba divertirme" (p. 348). This pitiful yearning indicates how she regards the occasion. The spoiling of the celebration by her companions' sinister plotting violates Petronila's whole view of the domestic situation, of the importance of her marriage, of family history. Note how she complains, "¡Ay!, mis copas, mis copas de bacarat, el regalo de mi padre. Y has hanchado las alfombras" (p. 349). The breaking of the glasses and ruining the decor means more to Petronila than just a shattered celebration; her idealized memories and illusions about family life seem to be symbolically contained in household objects, especially those brought out to celebrate the anniversary. In fact, the memory segment comes to an end as Petronila tries to reestablish the spirit of celebration: "Traeré los entremeses y los bocaditos . . ." (p. 349). Thus, she proves to be as obsessive as her sister, in an opposite manner.

After introduction in the first section of the play and having gained structural prominence in two subsequent segments, significant verbal constructions resurface towards the conclusion. Here we see how an important series of shaping units helps resolve dramatic developments. The last segment of the drama is, of course, dominated by the presence of the general; hence, the role of phrases in the past and future must be

considered in relation to the new speaker. Facing the guest, the family members summarily present their differing attitudes. Elisiria repeats the call for violence, "Podríamos matarlo ahora"; Higinio hesitates, "La casa se llenaría de sangre y no podríamos limpiarla nunca. . . . No puedo"; Petronila keeps struggling to preserve the household situation, "Mi hija le salvará. . . . Hablará de teogonía. . . . Hoy es el aniversario" (pp. 352-353). For the latter, persuasion away from the crime and perpetuation of spuriously cozy domestic image continue as principal concerns: "Lo que ibas a hacer es grosero y muy poco inteligente," she scolds her husband, and then adds, "Mi marido lee los periódicos todas las noches. . . . Yo me duermo escuchando el murmullo de su voz y pensando en mi niña" (p. 353). To the very end, then, each character remains fixed in a stance, determined by a view of the past, an assessment of the present, and a projection towards the future. In the presence of the general, however, these characters' attitudes become especially fatuous: Elisiria, ineffectual in her rebellion; Higinio, impotent in his retreat; Petronila, illusive in her conformity. In the absence of any possibility for change, the status quo seems destined to continue indefinitely. Yet now personal limitations appear to stem from defective psychologies rather than from circumstances, as suggested early in the play.

Having examined significant verb forms throughout El Mayor General . . . has given us an understanding of how micro-structural elements can help shape a dramatic work. By looking at the context and function of a salient series of phrases, we discover important details

regarding the presentation of situation, characters and themes. In El Mayor General . . . , past constructions reveal a family history that weighs down on the present; as the role of dark events becomes clearer, the various perspectives on these serve to differentiate characters and create dramatic tension. Personalities are further etched out in relation to the future, through the formulation of plans and expression of yearnings. Moreover, discussion of action to be taken makes for suspense, as expectations are aroused. This setting up of dramatic direction, along with resistance, shows us the organizational role of phrases with significant verb forms. Within certain segments, special constructions may predominate—the future of the murder plan, the past in the memories—stamping dramatic sequences with their distinctive qualities. On the other hand, the repeated appearance of these telling verb forms comes to constitute a linguistic strand that ties different segments together; unity and coherence are thus served. Ultimately, beyond the contributions of these verb forms to plot, characterization, and organization, there arise thematic implications. The presentation of the family members and their situation in relation to time helps communicate an especially discouraging view. True, adverse circumstances do afflict this group of people, but their fundamental problems lie rooted in flawed psychologies and self-defeating spirits. The past haunts them, either as an idealized period or as a source of regret and resentment; the future holds little promise, with only stultifying conformity or frustrated rage in store. By studying verb forms, we begin to grasp Triana's ideas on human limitations, further developed through other structural elements.



### Questions and Commands

While a prominent series of verb forms helps shape El Mayor General . . ., other micro-structural elements also contribute significantly to the play's formation. Among these, imperatives and interrogatives repeatedly arise, marking the dialog with peculiar characteristics. In fact, the general impression of verbal eccentricity given by the characters can, for the most part, be attributed to the special commands and questions that riddle their speech. To understand the role of these constructions, let us look at their context and function; thus, their contribution to dramatic development will become apparent.

The most prominent group of questions and commands that appear throughout Triana's play aim at arresting the flow of dialog. These originate in a speaker's uneasiness with certain themes and disgust with a companion's insistent elocutions. At the very beginning of the play, Petronila asks her sister, "¿Por qué te empeñas en esa historia de lo que no se hizo?" (p. 319). This initiates the tendency to question, not to gain information but to eliminate a topic from the conversation. Elisiria, for her part, later reacts with a similar displeasure to Petronila's sententiousness: "Por favor, no te empeñes en seguir . . ." (p. 322). This command and the previous question exemplify a salient mode of expression that diminishes communication throughout the play.

In the first section, it is primarily Elisiria who counters her companion's words with questions. Throughout a short stretch of dialog, she keeps wondering, "¿De qué te quejas? . . . ¿Por qué dices esas cosas? . . . ¿Qué? ¿Qué? . . . ¿Qué dices, qué dices?" (pp. 321-322).

This sort of questions minimizes or obfuscates previous statements. Interrogation surfaces as a manipulative device that obstructs the presentation of unsavory ideas or attitudes. Along with these constructions, there are other commands and questions that aim more directly at rechanneling the flow of dialog. Elisiria, for instance, first tries to prod the conformist sister into dissension by urging, "Recuerda. Reflexiona. Recuerda . . ." (p. 319); Petronila, however, resist unpleasant considerations by responding with her typical questions. Eventually, she will try more forcefully to establish verbal dominance by insisting, "¡Ah!, pero cambiemos el tema. . . . ¿A que no sabes lo que me dijo ayer el Mayor General?" (p. 322).

The various commands and questions come to constitute a distinctive set of structural determinants. In the first segment specifically, they emerge in relation to the household situation, showing the sisters' polarized perspectives. Generally, throughout different dramatic contexts, this expressive tendency mars communication among family members, further highlighting their defective relationship. To an obsession with the past, illusions about the present, and uncertainty regarding the future, the playwright adds the flawed interchange as still another damning dramatic element. The presence of questions and commands continues to delay information, to arrest the expression of feelings, and to reroute the dialog. This tendency towards verbal resistance and manipulation should be examined in different segments.

As an intermediate pattern of events, preparation for the party provides the central controlling action in the second segment. This principal concern is perpetuated and arrested by turns through the

emergence of questions and commands. In the process, the personalities of the sisters receive further clarification and their antagonistic relationship becomes more defined. Petronila's regard for domestic life, her idealized view of the marriage, now find expression in the bustling desire to set up the anniversary celebration. She spouts urgings and recommendations—"¿Sacaste los pastelitos del horno?" (p. 325), and "Hay que tenerlo todo preparado . . ." (p. 326). All the while, Elisiria counters her sister's frenzied enthusiasm with lines meant to diminish involvement: "¿Por qué gritas? . . . No te sulfures. No te sulfures, ¿eh?" (p. 325). Disgusted with this negative attitude, Petronila summarily asks, "¿Cuándo dejarás de ser así?" (p. 327). Otherwise, she reacts to Elisiria's words without comprehension: "¿Qué dices? No te entiendo" (p. 328). Yet, despite obstructions, Petronila manages to prevail, finally asserting, "Maravilloso . . . como lo había soñado" (p. 333). Elisiria's grudging cooperation, however, her refusal to share the festive mood, keep the companions unreconcilably distant. At many moments during the interchange, lack of connection between the sisters stands out through commands and questions; this is illustrated in any number of instances, as when Petronila asks, "¿Quieres ayudarme?" and, receiving another question for an answer—"¿Para qué?"—then responds with the same, now incredulous, "¿Para qué?" (p. 328). So, in the preparatory stage of the celebration, when communal effort should have breached differences, individual attitudes become even more defined through conflict.

In segments where the central shaping force involves a struggle for predominance, manipulative verbal elements are commonplace. Hence,

throughout the presentation of the murder plan and, afterwards, as memories come to the fore, questions and commands figure prominently in the dialog. In the former section, these structural units may be classified into two groups: those that delay, weaken, or detract from the exposition of homicidal schemes, and those that contribute to the rallying for murder. Again, each sister represents an opposite point of view yet employs very similar forms of expression to gain ground, trying to succeed in swaying Higinio towards either conformity or rebellion.

Foremost as obstructions to the murder plan, a series of interrogative lines arise in the segment. The characters here spend much time questioning one another about feelings and reasons, yet these inquiries lead to little understanding. As Higinio haltingly declares that his reputation is being ruined by the major general's gossip—a cause for rebellion—Petronila keeps attenuating the presentation with lines like, "¿Cómo? No. . . . ¿Entonces? . . . ¿Que él haya sido capaz?" (p. 338); this momentarily delays the resolution to commit murder, "Lo mataremos" (p. 339). Even after Higinio's declaration, as rebelliousness reigns, Petronila continues to formulate her opposition through questions. "Si lo matamos. ¿Qué podemos hacer?" (p. 341), she asks and soon adds, "Pero díganme, ¿cuál es la injuria? ¿Cuál?" (p. 342). Of course, she can also be more direct in her persuasion. "¡No te metas tú!" (p. 339), she commands, trying to block Elisiria's exacerbating words; later, Petronila reminds her husband, "Acuérdate que le debemos muchos favores" (p. 343).

Interestingly, although Elisiria figures as an advocate of violence, she also displays some doubts through interrogation. Whereas Petronila's questions seemed a manipulative ploy; however, Elisiria's provide an undercurrent of cynicism, in keeping with her personality. "¿Nos salvaremos? ¿Podremos huir?" she wonders, meeting Higinio's certainty about freedom after violence with a doubt, "¿Libres?" (p. 340). This adds a suspenseful note to the presentation, creating psychological tension rather than conflict in a relationship, as with Petronila's own questions. The fact that Elisiria feels uncertain about results and still proposes violence makes her determination all the more obsesional. Questions that reflect self-doubt, then, add a fleeting but significant touch to characterization.

Naturally, Elisiria also employs—along with Higinio—imperatives that encourage the murder plan. The rebellious sister will try to assuage Higinio's fears—"No te preocupes" (p. 340)—or brush aside her opponent's objections—"Déjala. Es necesario que nos ocupemos de esto" (p. 342). More directly, Elisiria fans the husband's anger to instigate a revolt: "Date cuenta que los empleados de la oficina sabían aquello" (p. 341). Higinio, for his part, will seek to put off Petronila—"Déjame ya, mujer" (p. 34)—or to diminish her reluctance—"No seas tan débil" (p. 342). The accomplices thus share both a defensive and an offensive use of commands, opposing the conformist point of view through lines that establish distance from it or militate against it.

The interplay of persuasion and resistance continues in the memory segment, as the characters aim to validate their view of the past. Here, the urgency of commands and questions reflects the close relation

between a perspective on previous events and a present attitude towards the household situation. This connection will influence each character's stance of conformity or rebellion. A speaker frequently tries to establish his memory not only through presentation but by trying to involve a companion in that vision of the past. Petronila, for instance, endeavors to soothe her husband with, "Escúchame. . . . ¿Estás molesto conmigo? . . . Mira que es nuestro aniversario. . . . No seas así. . . . Te olvidas de nuestra pequeña muñeca. . . . Mírala. . . . Acuérdate, acuérdate . . ." (pp. 343-344). She thus aims to arrest Higinio's growing determination to commit murder. By sharing her idealized view of their homelife through a bittersweet memory, the husband might abandon disruptive thoughts and help preserve the domestic situation.

Higinio, in turn, formulates resistance by commanding Petronila, "No me recuerdes. . . . No te empeñes en eso. . . . No me atormentes . . ." (p. 344). Stronger opposition, however, comes from Elisiria. She soon takes up the dominant voice in the segment, using a series of commands and questions to win Higinio over. First of all, Elisiria invites him to dance, which creates the intimacy necessary to insure his complicity. Then, through declarations of long-standing desires, she starts prodding Higinio towards an awareness of mutual involvement; thus, she tries to motivate his rebellion, pointing to a common fate influenced by the intertwined conflicts of the past (pp. 345-347). Nonetheless, proving true to his nature, Higinio resists his sister-in-law just as he did his wife. Expressing his amazement through questions,

his distress through commands, he avoids total commitment to Elisiria's view. "¿Que no te casaste, por mí?" he asks, trying to fend off responsibility, and then adds a string of silencing lines: "No me digas eso. . . . Dejemos esto. . . . No lo repitas. . . . No hables tan alto . . ." (p. 346). Once again Higinio is shown to be oscillating between rebellion and conformity. The ultimate blow to a conspiracy with Elisiria comes after she suggests, "Consuélate y recuerda. . . . Recuerda . . ." (p. 347). This backfires as Higinio then admits to having had homicidal intentions against his sister-in-law. The appearance of interrogative and imperative lines thus serves to generate much of the dialog in the segment, bringing discussion towards a climax and a momentary, unexpected resolution. Once more, manipulative verbal elements help define characters within unchanging, obsessional mentalities rather than lead to any lasting alliances.

In the final reprise each sister reiterates the persuasive rhetoric associated with her particular stance. Higinio here keeps vacillating between the women. When Elisiria urges, "Decídete de una vez," he answers, "Noooo." When she insists, "Tenemos que matarlo," he acquiesces weakly, "Sí." This interchange with mercurial rejoinders has Petronila's own earnest arguments for a frame; she pleads, "No lo maten, por favor. Sé bueno, Higinio. Haz lo que te pido" (p. 349). The brief scene reaches resolution with the husband's evasive invitation, "Bailemos, bailemos, bailemos" (p. 350). The bizarre nature of the ensuing dance, like a circle of demonic communion, displays rebellion and celebration at the same time; while the dancing and chanting are rowdy

and disruptive, they retain the sublimating effect of ritualistic jubilation. Failing to rejoice in the anniversary or to take decisive action against the status quo, the family members can only unit in a boisterous display that releases tensions but does not deal directly with their situation.

After all the characters have demonstrated the use of commands and questions to resist and manipulate others, it is interesting to see how the major general—supposedly the supreme manipulator—partakes of this expressive tendency. Significantly, the new speaker addresses the family as a group, not distinguishing in queries and exhortations among individual members; this underscores a common plight despite internecine tensions. "¿Qué pasa?" the major general asks, "¿Por qué se arrastran? Bastante tienen, ¿no? ¿Cuáles son los motivos? Díganme, díganme. . . . Levántense. . . . ¿Me habían invitado a la recepción. . . . Bien, explíquenme" (p. 351). Thus, he aims to steer the scene away from unworthy displays and confusing verbiage. This desire for clarification contrasts with the family's own evasive questions and silencing commands. Still, the major general's words only lead to further verbal disorder in an ensuing accumulation of subterfuge and disoriented interrogation. The final, chaotic reaction of the family prompts him to pose the ultimate question: "¿Hablar? Hablar, ¿para qué?" (p. 354). This emerges as the culmination of structural elements that aim to influence the course of dialog. Here, the general's lines bring the play to a close, leaving us with the impression that silence is preferable to a meaningless interchange.



From beginning to end, we have seen how the presence of questions and commands influences the generation and direction of dialog. Moreover, these constructions help define the characters and their relationship; at once, individual traits are delineated—Petronila's domestic yearnings, Elisiria's rebelliousness, Higinio's lack of commitment—and connections are drawn among different personalities—the need to resist and manipulate others rather than engage in a productive exchange of feelings and attitudes. The speakers will shift from an aggressive to a resistant stance, as they struggle to enforce or maintain their point of view through offensive or defensive lines—silencing commands or obtuse questions. This helps create a climate where communication among people with obstinately set mentalities remains impaired. Ultimately, the adulteration of the dialog with questions and commands influences the flow of speech in terms of rhythm and tone. To a great extent, the unusual quality of verbal interchange in the play emerges from the frequently disjunctive progression of lines, tainted by alienating postures; this will be seen more clearly when we examine dialog patterns. In summation, interrogative and imperative constructions act as a principal formative element by contributing to characterization, atmosphere, and cadence.

#### Ellipses and Pauses

Just as manipulative and defensive constructions affect the quality of communication in El Mayor General . . ., the occasional but significant occurrence of silence in various contexts of the play helps endow the dialog with its anomalous characteristics. An absence of

words here can be as meaningful as any elocution. Basically, this takes two forms in the work: the ellipsis and the pause. Whereas imperatives and interrogatives mostly hindered interaction, manifestations of silence generally tend to taint self-expression. The ellipsis creates a disconcerting effect within the structure of sentences; pauses riddle longer passages, arresting continuity with emphatic voids. Both types of shaping presences function as a sort of punctuation, full of implications about bordering words. Let us then look more closely at the placement and precise role of silences tellingly interspersed throughout the verbal fabric.

As any structural series, cut-off phrases have a cumulative effect yet give rise to various interpretations depending on dramatic context. "Y toda nuestra infancia y la vida misma . . . ," says Elisiria at the beginning of the play, introducing a tendency towards the fragmentation of words without further clarification. Here, Petronila interrupts her sister, leaving the line as a lingering outcry; the period of suffering seems thus all the more oppressively long. The particular nature of the grievance is not yet defined—only the weight of time becomes painfully apparent. Later, when Petronila complains, "Queridita mía, contigo la vida se hace imposible. Una simple . . . ," Elisiria in turn cuts her short with, "¡Basta!" (p. 328); the blank created by the interruption underscores both the complaint of one speaker and the impatience of the other, stressing their exacerbated relationship.

More often in the play, elliptical phrases appear not as the result of interruptions but as a form of expressive disability. As such, these truncated lines indicate a lack of definite ideas, a difficulty

with the formulation of thoughts. Early on, Petronila tries to counter negative remarks about the family situation with, "A pesar de todo. . . . Aunque . . ." (p. 319); from the beginning, this weakens her defense of the domestic status quo. Still trying to assert her point of view, the conformist sister states awkwardly, "Y a fin de cuentas, en el mundo andamos . . . y yo haré . . ." (p. 321). The intellectual shortcomings of the characters thus surface, showing the inability to argue coherently. Inchoate wisdom and decisiveness without clear objectives tend to cloud expression. This seems especially detrimental when a forceful assertion of point of view becomes a primary necessity in dramatic proceedings. So, Petronila stumbles verbally as she tries to counter the drive towards violence. Trying to voice doubts, she typically stammers, "Además, no creo . . ." (p. 340); further on, she fails to sum up the defense of the family's relationship with the general: "Pero al final . . ." (p. 342). Here, when Elisiria challenges her—"Eso . . . al final, ¿Qué?"—Petronila must admit, "No sé."

Although Petronila, as the flustered sister whose world is threatened, most often puts forth incomplete statements, her companions also exhibit this flaw in expression. Not surprisingly, given his blurred definition, Higinio also shows some mental incapacity through vague or incomplete declarations. Thus, complaining about the insidious gossip attributed to the general, the husband stammers: "Contó en la bodega de los Olivos. . . . Me lo dijo Marfa Antonia . . ." (P. 341). When Petronila presses him for more precise information—"¿Qué dijo,

qué dijo?"—he echoes her earlier response, "No sé." It makes his resentment all the more irrational, pointing to an obsessional mentality not unlike his wife. Thus, despite different attitudes, psychological ties between characters are revealed through shared verbal idiosyncracies. Similar to Petronila, he also leaves statements incomplete; urged to make a commitment to violence, he hesitates, "Entonces. . . . Después . . . ." (p. 349). The mercurialness of the character here becomes more clearly defined as expression falls behind shifts in stance.

Even the assertive Elisiria, with strong feelings and a sharp tongue, displays the tendency towards ellipses. "Y no se puede volver atrás," she affirms at one point; "¿No es cierto también? Pues, entonces. . . . Entonces . . . ." (p. 322). Her sister then insists—"¿Qué dices, qué dices?"—but the distracting answer comes, "Nada." Typical of these uncommunicative characters, the response points beyond the struggle for expression towards an unwillingness even to try putting feelings into words. Elisiria here seems to give up on logical discourse, abandoning the possibility of meaningful interchange with her sister. Later, however, when Higinio asks his sister-in-law to define freedom, she, too, appears confounded: "Yo . . . ," says Elisiria, searching for an idea until her interlocutor has to fill in, "No sé" (p. 343). Silences associated with important questions thus indicate the absence of solid intellectual foundations under the characters compulsive and anguished remarks. Inarticulateness, as much as any expressive tendency, ironically binds characters together through the mutual lack of understanding that plagues their troubled world.

In addition to brief breaks in the verbal flow, longer lulls also contribute to dramatic presentation. Frequently, a speaker will sink into silence after some observation or an expression of feelings. Just as abruptly cut off phrases indicated mental idiosyncracies, these pauses show a proclivity towards alienating self-absorption. When silence comes at intervals among the lines of a speech or between speakers, it discloses an inner world that breeds turmoil. Hence, Elisiria punctuates her regrets with meditative pauses: "(para sí.) Fue un paso demasiado comprometedor. (Pausa.) Luego vinieron las complicaciones" (p. 320). When the unhappy sister wistfully continues—"Yo sé lo que hablo. (Pausa.) Antes oíamos el canto de los pájaros"—Petronila chimes in, "A Higinio le aburren esas pequeñeces. Más de una vez me lo ha insinuado cuando yo recordaba. . . . (Pausa.)" Here, the memory overwhelms her, giving way to a statement of conformity, "Contigo estoy que tenemos inconvenientes, grandes inconvenientes. Pero la vida pasa y no nos damos cuenta." Por Elisiria, the pauses join the past mistake with an unhappy present, showing moments when fuel is added to her rebelliousness. Petronila, on the other hand, moves from silence to defense of the status quo, in suggested association with the memory of the daughter. In a future segment, pauses that contain brewing emotions mark the way through formulation of murder plans or resistance thereof. Higinio, for instance, identifies the general as the cause of the family's misfortune—"¿Quién si no él? (Pausa)"—and then proposes a concerted act of violence, "Elisiria, ¿me acompañas?" She answers, "Lo necesito. (Pausa)" (p. 340). The conspirators' silent brooding binds them closer than words.

Doubts as much as determination emerge in the dialog as the characters plunge into generative silences. "Perfecto," Higinio labels the murder plan with satisfaction, but the ensuring pause leads Elisiria to ask, "¿Nos salvaremos? ¿Podremos huir? Hay que preparar las maletas y sacar los pasajes para el primer tren de la madrugada. ¿Nos salvaremos? (Pausa)" (p. 340). Framed by questions, the assertion is shown to have weak intellectual foundations, which precipitates resolution towards the gulf of silent uncertainty. In fact, the last pause leads to Higinio's own admission of incertitude about results: "Esas cosas nunca se saben." As could be expected, Petronila also falls into apprehensive silences while voicing objections to the murder plans. For instance, at one point she expresses resistance through confusion that evolves silently into an unfulfilled wish for reassurance: "No entiendo. (Pausa.) ¿luego?" (p. 341). Whether products of self-doubt or of the worried assessment of others' schemes, pauses slow down the drive towards violence; thus, they figure as an element of dramatic tension, halting the general direction of the segment briefly through moments of reflection that counter frenzied verbosity.

Appearing throughout the play, pauses come to influence the overall impression of the drama, helping to depict a world of subjacent but readily explosive turmoil. This special atmosphere arises from the accentual and rhythmic effects of the interspersed silences. Pauses may emerge as catalytic preambles to important declarations or they may also follow pivotal statements as a meditative aftermath to a charged speech or interchange. Moreover, the momentary absence of words gives

many passages a troubling cadence that significantly stamps dramatic development.

In looking at pauses as an emphatic technical device, we may recall how Elisiria's complaints about family life were followed or preceded by significant silence; besides implying certain psychological characteristics like self-absorption, each lull provided a mute stress on statements of dissatisfaction. Petronila, in turn reasserts the need for domestic harmony, letting her personal philosophy sink in affirmations like, "Hay cosas que una debe guardar para poder ser feliz con los demás. (Pausa larga)" (p. 324). Silences, then, accentuate points of view. So, Petronila says in relation to the general, "Y él tratará de aliviarnos la carga. (Pausa.) Un aniversario. Veintisiete años de casada. . . . Soy feliz" (p. 331); the pause here serves as a subverbal connection between the role of the general as overseer and the conformist sister's gratification with the status quo. In the case of Elisiria, pauses sometimes lead from complaints about the general to calls for rebellion; note her statement to Higinio: "Quizás tu mujer te oculte lo que pasa. Yo te contaré todos los insultos. (Pausa.) Emplearé cualquier medio. Hay que arriesgarse" (p. 332).

Naturally, beyond highlighting particular perspectives, pauses generally emphasize—in conjunction with detrimental verbal habits—the flawed process of communication among the characters. This can involve a rejection of dialog, as when Petronila asks, "¿Qué dices, qué dices?," and Elisiria answers, "Nada. (Pausa muy larga)" (p. 322). Or a silence may serve as a magnifier of doubt and confusion; later in the dialog,

Petronila repeats, "¿Qué dices? (Pausa.) No te entiendo" (p. 328). Punctuated by pauses, then, statements often fail to build bonds among speakers who plunge into chasms of self-absorption. These silent valleys—even more than the rushing stream of obsessional or oppressive phrases—reveal the misfortune of characters that share problems, yet remain isolated; ironically, the very same difficulties these people have in common, as in the case of alienating silences, contribute to the lack of understanding and harmony.

There remains a final consideration regarding the appearance of pauses in the play. Beyond the role of emphasizing themes and characterization, this structuring element affects the rhythm of the dialog, thereby influencing the impact of speeches and the direction of interchange. While silence often serves to etch out statements and point to mental states, the concomitant slowing down of the presentation seems to thicken the atmosphere, increasing the weight of words. Along with all the incommunicative tendencies displayed by the characters, silences stultify proceedings. This can be seen in the laborious expression of point of view common to Petronila, as when she analyzes her husband's situation: "Y tenemos que defenderle. Es lo usual en estos casos. (Pausa.) No le quieren. Nadie le quiere. (Pausa.) Y como comprenderás, no es ningún tonto. Es importante sobrevivir. Tenemos que. . . . Tú sabes . . ." (p. 323). Sometimes the pauses add tension to the presentation. This is especially apparent when Higinio assesses familial relations. He begins with some hesitation—"Hace ya mucho. . . . Antes, entonces, no sé cuando. . . . Yo estaba como ausente"



(p. 347)—then continues with a somber pace partially set by pauses—"Entonces. . . . ¿Recuerdas? Hacíamos locuras. (Ríe amargamente.) Era divertido, ¿verdad? (Pausa.) El barro estaba mojado"; the interspersed halts leading up to the painful memory help give the speaker the qualities indicated by the playwright, "(como un tonto y al mismo tiempo alucinado)."

The rhythmic effect of pauses is further illustrated in how these function as pivots along the development of discourse. In this case, a lull in the verbal flow sets off one conversational topic from another, usually after an abrupt shift. We see this in Petronila's command, "¡Ah! pero cambiemos el tema. (Pausa.) ¿A qué no sabes lo que me dijo ayer el Mayor General?" (p. 322). She does this again more emphatically later, "No me explico. (Pausa larga.) Hace calor. En este tiempo se hace de noche tan temprano" (p. 331). Towards the end, Petronila tries to curb further inflammatory discussion of the general's visit, desperately trying to preserve tranquility: "Pensaba divertirme. (Pausa. Como si empazara a rezar.) Unicamente mi hija puede hacer el milagro y salvar al Mayor General" (p. 350). These instances show how the disjunctive quality of the dialog can arise from silences accompanied by shifts, which makes for a choppy conversational rhythm, one more disconcerting factor in the presentation.

Having examined the use of silences in various contexts throughout the play, we should now understand the way in which an element beyond diction or sentence structure can help define characters, interaction, and atmosphere. The lulls created by failed expression or

moments of ponderous stillness become as significant a presence as any location. Through these, inner struggles are intimated and outward conflicts underscored. Pointedly, silences in the drama—a world generated through words—become the ultimate sign of disintegration, as individuals struggling with themselves and their surroundings relinquish speech.

### Platitudes and Hyperbole

There remain two seemingly opposite yet related sets of micro-structural elements to be examined at the level of words and phrases in El Mayor General . . .. On the one hand, a series of platitudinal statements associated with Petronila appears in the play containing traditional wisdom in handed-down formulations. In contrast, a tendency towards intense speech also surfaces—shared by all family members—entailing either an idealization of reality or an exacerbation thereof. Hyperbolic language thus magnifies aspects of people, objects, and events, endowing them with extraordinary qualities, whether positive or negative. Platitudes embrace circumstances and expediently reduce them to psychologically manageable proportions. Both linguistic tendencies, though disparate in construction, figure as manifestations of the same peculiarity in the characters. While some expressive tendencies, like commands, primarily present struggles among speakers, and others like meditative pauses point to interior turmoil, exaggerations and statements or common wisdom highlight the confrontation of individuals with conditions in their surrounding reality. These series of elocutions reveal the way that intellect, however flawed, and imagination, however obsessional, deal with the encroachment of circumstances.

Platitudinal statements appear throughout El Mayor General . . . in different dramatic contexts. Yet their general implications, arising from derivative wisdom and formulaic construction, remain the same. Associated with Petronila, platitudes are part of her conformist stance. At times when conflict threatens her need for domestic harmony, Petronila will interject into the dialog a comforting dose of common wisdom. So, faced with Elisiria's objections to the coming of the general, the accommodating sister states, "quizás él pueda ayudarnos. Nunca se puede cerrar una puerta sin antes haber . . . tú sabes. . . . Yo me entiendo" (p. 322). The cut-off phrase here, complemented by a self-satisfied remark, underscores the highly egocentric motivation for the platitude. Instead of having an explanatory purpose, the statement falteringly rationalizes Petronila's behavior; though her words fail as a supporting argument, they do perpetuate her need for harmonious relations with the general, reenforcing a comforting view of reality. She transforms him from a threatening figure into an ally, a possible source of familial prosperity. Not surprisingly, this verbal mannerism irritates Elisiria, who at one point admonishes her sister, "Déjate de refranes." (p. 324). Yet Petronila continues to rely on commonplace wisdom as a stabilizing mechanism. Although the banality of her statements indicates intellectual deficiency—contributing to a negative characterization—this does not diminish the importance of platitudes in the rhetoric of conformity.

Interestingly, exaggerated statements join banal sayings as part of Petronila's defense of the status quo; thus, contrasting verbal habits basically stem from the same yearning. In the case of hyperbole, the aim

is to raise the value of important aspects of the surrounding world. Hence, references to the general, to the aborted daughter, and to the anniversary celebration gain extraordinary characteristics. A depiction of the general, for instance, can include mention of his extreme erudition, marvelous skills, and—most importantly—the awesomeness of his power. As Petronila says, "Y me pongo a pensar y a pensar y pienso que de tantos libros y aparatos que tiene, puede caernos encima el piso donde vive" (p. 322). The repetition of the verb pensar leading to the exaggerated description of the general's belongings pointedly underscores the effect of surrounding reality on the speaker. Within this psychological matrix, the hyperbole figures as part of a peculiarly personal perspective. The general and his world are viewed as imposingly superior, demanding continued support from a family that lives, quite literally, under his weighty presence. Complementing this imposing picture, there arise expressions of delight at the general's abilities. When, we are told, "alguien canta un salmodia," and "él que canta por momentos se desentona," Petronila remarks: "El Mayor General tiene un espléndido día. Se ha puesto a cantar. ¡Qué hermosa voz!" This constitutes the enraptured high point of a panegyric in which Petronila also confesses, "me encanta oír hablar al Mayor General. ¡Qué imaginación! Delante de nosotros se deciden guerras fabulosas, cruzadas increíbles. Y legiones de ángeles vencen o mueren."

It is important to note that the magnification of reality often contains an accompanying deflating element that allows us to assess the validity of a hyperbolic assertion. Hence, admiration for a

supposedly impressive collection of books and objects leads to the ridiculous concern over the roof caving in. Later, the voice of the putative great singer cracks in the shower. Devaluation further occurs when Petronila speaks of the general as an agent of salvation: "Parecía un sacerdote dictando un sermón a sus filigreses. Decía, decía. . . . (Imitando el tono grandilocuente.) ¿Hasta cuándo dejarán de ser gusanos?" (p. 323). Expectations of lofty words vanish with a coarsely direct question. The emergence of these deflating elements helps clarify the mechanism involved in the generation of hyperbolic images. These are more definitely shown to be deceptively applied, part of the impulse to adapt reality willfully to serving a personal need. In Petronila's case, aggrandizement of the general helps maintain her household illusion, perpetuating a subservient relation to the supposedly great man.

Continuing the tendency towards deliberate elevation, references to the dead daughter and to the party also contain hyperbole. These have religious overtones and—along with references to the general as savior priest—constitute a system of images related to the eucharistic ritual that Virginia A. Brownell examines in detail.<sup>9</sup> There emerges a correspondence—in actions and meaning—between aspects of the Mass and preparations for the party, between worship and reverence for the dead daughter. Though this is a significant interpretation of events in the play, religious images are part of the larger structural series of intensifying phrases, further demonstrating the working of a peculiar mentality confronted with challenging circumstances. For Petronila,

handling objects for the celebration or meditating on the daughter serves to strengthen her stand for familial conformity, as she heightens the solemnity of the anniversary and turns the remains of the dead child into a holy matrimonial icon.

As objects take on ritualistic properties, they also bear a relation to family history and—it is important to note—they also elicit Petronila's maternal concerns. She thus describes the tablecloth elatedly: "Un tejido excepcional. Lo trajeron de la India unos contrabandistas de opio. ¿Recuerdas aquella historia inverosímil que contaba la tía Rosa? ¡Cuidado! ¡Cuidado! Si se llega a estropear me moriría. Lo mismo que si fuera un niño. Es tan delicado" (p. 327). This tenderness towards objects surfaces once more in reference to the champagne glasses: "Copitas mías, copitas de sueño. Son como adormilados ruiseñores. Canten, canten. Lirilón lonlin. Cuando el Mayor General ponga los labios en sus cuerpecitos serán más puras" (pp. 330-331). Preoccupation with the frailty of the glasses ties in with worries about perilously balanced household circumstances. A toast with champagne would certify the sanctity of the family and sustain continuity. Significantly, there arises an imagistic connection of the glasses with the dead daughter. As Petronila later says, "Aun conservo su cuerpecito disecado. En una urna de cristal. (Muy digna.) Aunque nadie quiera ceerlo. . . . Una reliquia de amor" (p. 335). Further recalling the sleeping crystal nightingales, she adds more about the daughter: "Dormida entre cristales. Como una reinecita" (p. 344). Fragility and great worth continue to be unifying characteristics among these sacred

objects. Furthermore, the intensifying images emerge at times when Petronila feels threatened by Elisiria's complaints or by the complicity to commit murder.

Again, an element of devaluation accompanies hyperbole of a religious tenor. A risibly absurd strain enters the fantastic story of the tablecloth; regard for the glasses seems both childish and ridiculously material; reverence for the daughter's remains passes into the grotesque. These disparaging features emphatically point towards Petronila's peculiarly obsessed mentality. She keeps on pertinaciously fanning illusions about family life through fanciful elaboration on questionable aspects of reality.

As can be expected, when Elisiria exhibits a tendency towards hyperbole, though the mechanisms remain very similar, her lines figure as part of the disruptive rhetoric in the play. Primarily, this sister makes statements that magnify oppressive conditions in the household and heighten formulation of the murder plans. Early, Elisiria describes the house as decayed and stifling, without easily available exit. She says, "Esta maldita casa. Siempre aquí dando vueltas y vueltas"; and, also, "Esas malditas escaleras están que se caen solas. Con un viente-cito . . . ¡pfuaf! al suelo" (p. 330). Soon, she summarizes: "Esta casa es un laberinto" (p. 331). This view contrasts sharply with Petronila's imaginative version of the surroundings—"Es divertido. Y romántico. Como en las novelas y en las películas. La lluvia cae en los aniversarios. Hay que encender todas las velas, así la casa tendrá un aspecto mas íntimo" (p. 333). Atmosphere, equally heightened but

oppositely transformed, is thus rendered through each of the sisters' individual perspectives.

Just as Petronila perpetuated her view of the family, supporting conformity through intensifying statements, her sister contradictorily elaborates the murder plan relying on hyperbole. Elisiria proposes to dispose of the general: "Le mataremos. Arrastraremos su cuerpo hasta dejarlo destrozado. Con las uñas cavaré un gran foso" (p. 341). An emphasis on great proportions magnifies the act; as she recommends, "Debemos emplear un cuchillo bien grande" (p. 339). Along with gory details and exaggerated proportions, perverse religious overtones arise in the murder plans. Descriptions thus acquire a ceremonial solemnity. "Su sangre nos servirá de alimento," states the inflamed Elisiria; "Seremos santificados después" (p. 340). This reflects the same proclivity towards ritualization shown by Petronila, now obversely manifested in a diabolical scheme presented as a sort of black Mass. For both women, then, but in opposite fashion, aggrandizing language turns projected action—whether conformist celebration or violent rebellion—into a ritual of salvation.

We have seen how odd or ridiculous qualities devaluated Petronila's intense statements, emphasizing her idiosyncratic psychology and diminishing the reliability of her viewpoint. Similarly, Elisiria's forceful elocutions ultimately lose rhetorical value. No matter how crucial for the exasperated speaker, plans for the murder contain such grotesque details that they become alienating. Indeed, Petronila's resistance gains validity by underscoring with repulsion the hideousness



of the homicide. For instance, she counterpoints the magnitude of Elisiria's machinations with mention of the old man's frailty—"Una canallada. . . . Es tan viejecito" (p. 340); moreover, she warns her husband, "Te mancharás las manos de sangre. . . . Siento náuseas" (p. 342). This disgust with the proposed violence parallels Elisiria's own irritation at the conformist sister's rapturous references to the dead daughter and idealization of the general; hence, fanciful flights of exaggerated speech serve as still another distancing factor.

As an over-all structural series, hyperbolic constructions turn out to be instrumental in revealing the interworkings of psychology and surrounding reality. These shaping elements help define characters, highlighting idiosyncratic traits and setting them in situation. The complex relationship of the sisters, at once opposed yet connected by fundamental characteristics, is further exposed through shared linguistic tendencies. Both women put forth intensifying images that underscore fixations rather than a clear apprehension of reality. Hyperbolic statements transform events and feelings so that as expression gains in intensity, the viewpoint loses reliability. Along with platitudes that minimize reality, hyperbole that aggrandizes it constitutes an important aspect in the negative characterization of speakers and their world. These verbal tendencies take part in the process of the debasement of language so prominent in the play. Instead of bridging differences and validly assessing circumstances, the voicing of wisdom and the conception of forceful images function as self-serving linguistic manifestations of personal obsessions, more rigidly esconcing characters

within their oppressive existence. Given the two attitudinal extremes, then—conformity without a substantial basis, rebellion without a realistic focus—entrapment of the characters seems based on the fatalistic perpetuation of their own flaws through denigrating verbal habits.

### Dialog Patterns and the Macro-Structure

The examination of significant words and phrases has shown how micro-structural elements help shape the play at the minimal level. These affect particular dramatic contexts and establish, through reiteration, verbal tendencies across the play. Accordingly, characters and their relationship are drawn, and situation presented, developed, and intensified as salient forms of expression define dramatic proceedings. Micro-structural elements such as special tenses and constructions thus figure as architectonic units, the primary building blocks of drama. Still, in order to acquire a more complete understanding of the workings of structure, a wider critical focus must be adopted; this would reveal patterns in the dialog that embrace minute linguistic constituents. In the case of meaningful words and phrases, structural function was derived from linguistic form and placement; the role of dialog patterns, however, depends mostly on dynamics, contributing to coherence and progression in the interchange. These verbal aspects arise from a dominant topic of discussion and the relation among speakers that this sets up. In looking at dialog patterns, then, our attention should remain on the exposure and development of tensions through conversational subjects. As a specific concern provides unity for a phase in the dialog, speakers

will take stands—close or far from one another—and continue to support a point of view, drawing near or distancing themselves from others. Seeing how the topic of interchange and character distance generate dialog patterns will allow us to delve deeper into the nature of the play; just like word and phrase arrangements, dynamic elements in the play carry important thematic implications.

As we keep in mind the factors involved in dialog patterns, dramatic developments can be analyzed from a wider critical perspective. Character groupings give rise to three main sections in the play that entail incrementation of speakers on scene, from two to four. These divisions may be broken down into the already described segments, each of which contains a dominant topic and shows verbal markers on its dramatic borders. Dialog patterns within which shaping words and phrases coalesce give rise to the coherence and integrity of segments. Ultimately, the over-all shape of the play—its macro-structure—emerges from the accretion of discrete dramatic units, the continuum patterned by linguistic form in flow.

The first major section of the play involves the three segments with Petronila and Elisiria as the only speakers. The sisters go through several confrontations displaying differences in regard to a central concern in each phase of the dialog. As their interchange progresses, the women shift roles, sometimes taking the dominant voice, sometimes acting as antagonists or even showing complete detachment. In the opening, "entrapment" segment, the dialog revolves around an onerous past event and its relation to conditions in the present, an emotional point

of contention. Throughout here, Elisiria maintains an aggressively negative voice, expressing regret and frustration while Petronila counters her remarks. Disagreement about the central topic here spills into acidic personal attacks. From the beginning, conflict clouds the atmosphere as Elisiria makes her complaints a challenge for the conformist sister: "Sí, ¿por qué pones esa cara? Pudimos habernos ido pasados ya los primeros días de la convalecencia. . . . Pero fuiste tú quien empezó con quejas sentimentales" (p. 319). Petronila mostly responds with short, disparaging remarks like: "Tonterías, hermana, tonterías" (p. 319), and "Y dale que dale" (p. 320). Occasionally, however, she manages to come up with more extensive and substantial argument against her companion's barrage of grievances. So it is with Petronila's explosive indictment against the oppressive family structure of their childhood years, making the present domestic situation seem preferable (pp. 320-231).

The dialog between the sisters, then, moves through a dialectic as the sisters' opposition—conformity versus maladjustment—is established early and continues to generate discussion not only in the first segment but throughout the whole play. Yet, the assertions and counter-remarks presented by each speaker prove to be idiosyncratic. Elisiria's words come to constitute an escape mechanism for pent-up emotions rather than a reasoned exposition of evidence against the surrounding circumstances. Petronila resists the opposing point of view through defensive derogation, with only rare moments of solid argument. A true dialectic process, therefore, where ideas meet their opposites and move towards a resolution, is replaced here by a flawed version. Many of the

micro-structural elements already examined detract from the process of meaningful interchange and ultimately obliterate the possibility of synthesis of views. Self-absorbed silences, stultifying pauses, manipulative phrases among other verbal habits diminish the argumentative quality of the interchange between the sisters. We may, then, speak of an anti-dialectic pattern in the play. This involves, despite the characters' common concerns and close contact, a breakdown in the means of communication; that is, the dialog becomes negatively affected by a reluctance or an inability by the speakers to assess contrary points of view and effectively counter them or accede to the opposition. This anti-dialectic process initially involves a few awkward moments, slight obstructions in the dialog, but eventually takes over as the primary conversational pattern.

The tendencies that weaken communication may be followed in the first segment from Petronila's early stumbling for words, "A pesar de todo. . . Aunque . . ." (p. 319); through her attempts to edge away from Elisiria's complaints—"A Higinio le aburren esas pequeñeces" (p. 320); and as the conformist sister simply refuses to go on talking about negative conditions: "Me haces hablar más de lo que debo. (Pausa.) Se hace tarde" (p. 321). Ironically, this line comes when, instead of having said too much, she had just begun to unfold a valid argument against dissatisfaction with the current household situation. Still, Petronila does not continue to present her case but falls into silence and an evasion. When Elisiria echoes the phrase, "Se hace tarde," differences between the sisters are underscored. While

Petronila shows anticipation about the party, her companion—speaking "con fastidio"—hints through an unhappy disposition that the same state of affairs cannot continue much longer. Saying the same words—What would have indicated a point of convergence—thus measures the distance between the two women.

Beyond the early moments when the characters deviate from the topic of discussion and lose contact with each other, the initial segment shows anti-dialectic tendencies that predominate towards the end. After Elisiria tries to reintroduce the matter of a past error, the exchange between the sisters deteriorates into a series of personal insults. This section contains a string of questions by Petronila, showing not so much a need to understand better but a resistance to the comprehension of a divergent point of view. Elliptical phrases also stand out throughout here, leaving thoughts without completion. Elisiria, for instance, poses rhetorical questions in a flawed version of philosophical prodding that remains inconclusive: "Lo que está hecho, está ahí. ¿No es cierto? Y no se puede volver atrás. ¿No es cierto también? Pues, entonces. . . . Entonces . . ." (p. 322). As part of the anti-dialectic process, the lines fail to lead to some logical conclusion. In fact, the section concludes with confusion and a rejection of dialog. "¿Qué dices, qué dices?" exclaims Petronila, and her sister answers flatly, "Nada" (p. 322). The long silence that follows marks the end of the first segment. Since no synthesis or even intensification of opposing ideas has occurred, dramatic progression must then arise from an abrupt change of the central organizing topic. Petronila's

summary comparison of her sister to an eccentric aunt serves as a bridge to the next dramatic phase; the description of oddities not only devalues Elisiria's objections but, focusing on a distant character, draws attention away from the discussion of a current situation. Thus, detrimental to a valuable assessment of differences, the focus of the interchange becomes blurred, further alienating opposites.

We note, then, through this overview of the initial segment, how patterns emerge in the dialog, lending coherence and direction to a dramatic phase. Characters act, react, and interact according to individual perspectives on an organizing idea. Opposition here develops through confrontations that move the play forward, disclosing—albeit in limited measure—information about speakers and their situation. Throughout the clash of antithetical attitudes, disjunctive elements figure as a shaping presence, at first minor but ultimately predominant. This anti-dialectical tendency distances characters and describes a process of dialog disintegration. While the clash of opposites charges the atmosphere with conflict, their troubled interchange at least entails emotional and, however tenuous, intellectual contact. Elements of disjunction, however, make for the mutual exclusion or companions and lead to self-absorbed stagnation in the dialog. No exchange, adjustment, or even intensification of ideas can occur when the mechanisms of communication have broken down.

The interweaving of dialectic and anti-dialectic elements continues beyond the entrapment segment to become the basic dialog pattern in the play. Other topics of discussion besides the state of

the family enter the play; other speakers come on scene. Still, the workings of conflict and the coeval verbal disjunction endow the different segments with their fundamental shape in terms of unity and development. We should, then, go on to examine the various manifestations of the central organizing tendencies in the dialog.

In the second segment of the play, the focus is on the invitation of the general and preparation for the party. Again, the sisters' opposing perspectives on these matters generate the dialog. "¿Por qué lo invitaste?" asks Elisiria at the start of the section (p. 322). Petronila then takes up the dominant voice in defense of the landlord, interrupted by caustic objections her sister keeps posing. The differences between the speakers develop through Petronila's expressed admiration and Elisiria's irate accumulation of sarcastic labels for the general—"Y él se cree el omnipotente. El juez. El dominador" (p. 324). There occurs a rare moment of acquiescence when Petronila states, "Está bien, está bien. Ha sido una incongruencia y una falta de tacto el invitar al Mayor General" (pp. 324-325). Ironically, this happens at a point where Elisiria has exited, so the conformist sister is talking to herself. The lack of convergence between the speakers takes part in the anti-dialectic process, which was already present in silencing remarks by Elisiria: "¡Cállate!" and "¡Déjate de refranes!" (p. 324).

A new phase ensues in the segment as Petronila bustles about, preparing for the party and directing her sister. She urges Elisiria, "¿Estás haciendo los preparativos?" (p. 325). The reluctant companion



complies grudgingly or resists, which allows for disassociative tendencies to reemerge. The sisters' divergent attitudes eventually fail to create friction and culminate in a separation. As Petronila reaches a peak of excited involvement—"¡Ay, Elisiria!, Elisiria, me estoy volviendo loca. Loca de alegría" (p. 332)—her companion is immersed in thoughts of rebellion, rejecting everything the party stands for—"Haremos lo que sea necesario: huir o matar." The segment concludes with the two women at a seemingly unbridgeable distance: "(Petronila queda absorta contemplando la mesa. Elisiria se entrega a su costura y bosteza)" (p. 333).

The final section of the sisters' unharmonious duet perpetuates their difference and shows further deterioration of the means of communication. Functioning as a sort of reprise, the third segment takes up already established topics: the relation of a dark incident to present negative conditions and the idealization of the dead daughter as a symbol of domestic yearnings. These matters receive some development as further information paves the way for later conflict. It is learned here, for instance, that Petronila lost her baby in a shady "accident" for which Elisiria feels responsible. The way these revelations are presented exemplifies the anti-dialectic process. As Petronila insists on talking about the daughter, her sister tries to persuade her to change the topic; significantly, the former is not even listening, prompting Elisiria to reject the dialog altogether: "Ya es inútil que me ponga a hablar contigo" (p. 334). She then relates her version of the past incident, so absorbed in the memory that Petronila

is referred to in the third person—"De pronto las manos de ella, sus manos húmedas, me molestaron" (p. 334). Now, the conformist sister listens but fails—or refuses—to apprehend the meaning of her companion's words; "Dice cosas absurdas," states Petronila, and adds, "¿Qué dice, qué dice?" (p. 334). Again, the use of the third person underlines distance. Using her customary ploy to combat unpleasant considerations, Petronila reintroduces the topic of the dead daughter, and, then, gives a version of the dark incident as an unfortunate accident. Elisiria, in the meantime, continues with her own guilt-ridden rendition. In this last phase of the reprise, neither sister seems to be aware of the other's presence.

Throughout the reprise there are two speakers yet only one listener—in the first and second phases—or none—at the end. While important information is being related, verbal elements still convey self-absorption, resistance to comprehension, and confusion. Not surprisingly, being part of a failure in communication, the mutually exclusive yet contrapuntal speeches end in silence. The anti-dialectic process thus reaches a climactic stage. Previous segments also contained disjunctive verbal tendencies that ultimately reigned over any frail possibility of meaningful interchange. Yet the reprise emerges primarily as the culmination of disassociative features in the whole first section of the play, the sisters' duet. This makes for structural symmetry; the dialog pattern within minor phases—discussions leading to disintegrating verbal intercourse—are thus reflected in the wider scope of a major dramatic division. The occurrence of analogous

structural developments within progressively more extensive perimeters in the play contributes to coherence; this is the nesting effect that Bernard Beckerman identifies as one of the basic characteristics in dramatic construction.<sup>10</sup> The reprise segment, then, containing clarification (of previous organizing topics) and intensification (of verbal mannerisms) appropriately close off the long, initial section. Significant micro-structural elements are summarily collected and speaker relationships become exhausted so that dramatic course has to reopen for the introduction of a new character.

Higinio's entrance initiates the murder plan segment. Henceforth dialog patterns will emerge from the interplay of three voices. The polarization of the sisters continues throughout here from newly predominant topics that are nevertheless related to previous discussions. The presence of the husband adds tension and complexity to the interchange. As the sisters take individual stands on a particular subject, displaying typical verbal habits, now they also try to sway Higinio towards their personal viewpoints. The husband will at times identify with the conformist speaker, at times with the rebel. Hence, the dialectic continues as a shaping force in the latter segments. Ultimately, however, this communicative pattern once more gives way to an anti-dialectic process. No definite resolution is ever reached through Higinio's participation in the dialog as disjunction among the characters reigns supreme. Whenever tensions seem about to be worked out, with a particular perspective gaining prominence, speaker relationships are somehow upset, leading again to dispersion. The means of communication,

being negatively affected, places the family members in a trap where obsessive personal views obviate mutual contact.

The initial phase of the murder plan segment moves through the upsetting report of the general's insidious gossip. As Higinio gives a fragmented exposition, Petronila acts as a palliatively inquisitive interlocutor; on the other hand, Elisiria provides inflammatory comments. Here, elements that contribute to distance between speakers already surface. Higinio, for instance, refuses to consider his wife's doubts and proposes a violent solution to vexation by the general. When she begs for more concrete evidence of the latter's wrongdoing, her husband typically brushes her off, "Déjame ya, mujer" (p. 341). Given the weakness of Higinio's argument—all emotional intensity with little logical development—the exposition of the murder plan seems more irrationally extreme. Soon, Elisiria's statement, "Le mataremos" (p. 341), echoing her brother-in-law's proposition, leads to the conclusion of the phase: a decision has been taken and the determined accomplices now need only to quiet Petronila, if they cannot convince her to participate in the murder.

Petronila's reluctance to join in the murder is as defectively expressed as the support for violence. For instance, she tries to reach a convincing conclusion to an argument for conformity but fails: "Pero al final. . . . No sé" (p. 342). The segment, then, ostensibly takes shape through the formulation of plans, with two speakers professing violence while a third companion presents dialectic opposition. From the start, however, this pattern of driven proposals in the face

of dissent suffers from faulty rhetoric on both sides. Neither the advocates of violence nor the opposition manages to bring discussion to a successful resolution, gaining predominance through coherent development of viewpoint and logical conclusion. The segment significantly closes with Higinio's own admission of ignorance about the goal of violence: "¿Qué cosa es la libertad?" asks Petronila, and he answers, "No sé" (p. 343). This, along with Elisiria's vague definition of freedom—"está dentro de uno or demasiado cerca para alcanzarlo"—further indicates how the dialog remains highly charged with emotions rather than intellect. Expression here serves mostly as airing and reinforcement of obsessional ideas rather than a means of convincing presentation, reassessment, and possible adjustment of personal perspective.

The memory segment emerges, after an atmospheric pause, from the discussions of previous sections. Elisiria reintroduces the topic of the dark incident, now an extension of the argument for violent change, and Petronila brings up the dead daughter further to advocate domestic tranquility. Views of the past—and evaluation thereof in terms of import to the present—provide dramatic focus. Higinio listens to the sisters' different perspectives but fails to identify with either, even providing comments contrary to both. Hence, the dynamics of this segment perpetuate the established dialectical pattern. Moreover, disjunctive elements continue to proliferate. The persistent distance among characters culminates in Higinio's revelation about the past; he contradicts both women's insistent views, emerging as neither a compliant husband nor a committed rebel.

In the memory segment, physical arrangement notably reflect verbal relationships. When Thomas Van Laan talks about character grouping as a shaping device, he is referring to more than the visual impact—evoked in reading—of characters placed and moving around on scene.<sup>11</sup> Changing physical images as people enter or exit, move towards or away from one another, stand still or bustle about, correspond to structural qualities of the text. Van Laan specifically points to the manner in which formations stress opposition or harmony. The memory segment contains an illustration of the critic's comments. The boundaries constructed through prescribed physical action indicate speaker relationships. As Higinio's turmoil increases while Elisiria tries to spur and Petronila to restrain him, the husband "comienza a dar vueltas mientras Elisiria lo mira y sonríe. Petronila se sienta y comienza a tejer" (p. 345). The wife retains her domestic yearnings, and the sister-in-law remains provocative. When Elisiria and Higinio dance, what seemingly begins as a reaffirmation of complicity shifts into an unexpected clash. Ironically, here, though the in-laws are physically close, previously sympathetic interchange turns into fast-paced, discordant dialog, bickering over Higinio's nascent indecision. When this climaxes in his disclosure about wanting to kill Elisiria, she collapses into a chair; the couple's separation initiates a new dramatic phase. The ensuing solo by Higinio fills in background, better defining familial relations and roles—the naive wife, the temptress, and the guilt-ridden husband. At the end of the segment, the physical separation of the characters emphasizes the isolating effect of their preoccupations. Having passed

through unharmonious duets, moments of unison, and a climactic solo, all conclude with disjunctive comments that highlight fragmentation. Elisiria keeps blaming the general, "hemos sido sus víctimas"; Higinio regrets his behavior, "Me he portado como un perfecto imbécil. . . . Soy un inútil"; and Petronila holds on to her illusions, "Yo pensaba divertirme" (p. 348).

As a bridge that leads to the entrance of the general, the concluding section for the family trio shows an accelerated pace and intensification of predominant concerns that constitute a final reprise. Left alone on scene, Higinio and Elisiria open up the segment displaying previous tendencies; this little stretch of dialog manages to encapsulate past alliance and contention, straining towards some resolution of tensions. Elliptical constructions here reflect inconclusiveness of thought, uncertainty about results; commands, however, push towards a commitment to violence (p. 349). Reentering, Petronila tries to reestablish the spirit of celebration. Nudging the companions away from rebellion, the tone of her request trivializes the call for violence—"no lo maten, por favor. Sé bueno, Higinio. Haz lo que te pido" (p. 349). Typically, a misplaced maternalism shows in her urging of good behavior. As part of the effort to divert dissension, she tries to stir curiosity by saying that "el general prepara el libro de sus memorias y experimentos. Y hablará de Teogonía" (p. 349). Structurally, this shifts the focus to the imminent conclusion as the dramatic situation among the three characters reaches exhaustion.

As the sisters reemphasize their opposing stands and Higinio hesitates between them, the scene moves towards a dance. With

inebriated laughter, the husband avoids commitment, saying, "No. No. No. Bailemos, bailemos, bailemos" (p. 350). The percussive repetitions lead to the frenzied climax of the segment: "Las dos mujeres titubean. El las empuja. Forman una rueda y comienzan a saltar como demonios mientras gritan" (p. 350). This dramatic image has important formal implications. Dialog patterns, as we have seen, develop in the play through exposition of differences in a dialectic, accompanied by disjunctive elements that eventually predominate. In the circle dance and unison singing of "Arriba el cielo, abajo la muerte," the characters show themselves, despite individual idiosyncracies, to be caught up in the same obsessively revolving existence. Whatever interpretation is given to the song—as an anthem of liberation or fanfare before doom—the climactic grouping symbolically emphasizes the basic condition of the characters that generates the dialog. Haunted by the past, ineffectual in the present, uncertain about the future—detrimentally bound to the general—they share in their denigration yet remain isolated. Appropriately, upon the arrival of the guest of honor, the group disbands; still acting in common deference, however, they "caen de rodillas como derribados, después besan el suelo" (p. 350). Given their shared situation, distance among the characters seems all the more ironically accentuated by the different ways in which they intone, "El Mayor General"; Petronila, "chillando"; Higinio, "temblando"; and Elisiria with "voz opaca" (p. 350).

In the last segment, where all characters are assembled, the presentation of the general continues to be set against the background of the tripartite familial chorus. The general's two speeches also help



frame the last interchange among Petronila, Higinio, and Elisiria. The dialog at first tentatively arises from the general's inquiry about the group's behavior; he is disconcerted and, at moments, scornful, and they give flustered explanations. Rapidly paced and nervous in tone, their lines soon fall back into the rebellion-conformity argument. The conflict and fragmentation here show the relationship of the characters to one another and to the surrounding reality to be precipitously disintegrating. The possibility of a productive confrontation with the figure that dominates their lives thus vanishes. In fact, the general's last speech contains a rejection of dialog that figures as the ultimate manifestation of the anti-dialectic process. Beyond interior dynamics that conclude the play's preponderant dialog patterns, the last segment gives us an important perspective on the over-all shape of the play—the features and direction of the macro-structure.

Throughout La Noche . . ., several references to the general prepare us for his eventual entrance. The question, "¿Vendrá el Mayor General?," emerges at intervals, operating in various manners within the structure. The first time this question appears, it serves to introduce a new segment, thereafter leading to much discussion as the sisters reveal their divergent attitudes towards the general's coming to the party. In the following segments, reiterated references to the landlord remain formally significant, as they arise to accentuate Petronila's enthusiasm (e.g., p. 325) and Elisiria's distaste (e.g., p. 327). When we consider mention of the general's imminent arrival along with his audible presence through distant singing, the retelling of his anecdotes

and speeches, and the divergent but frequent descriptions of his behavior, this figure emerges as a leitmotif. He thus acts, through various dramatic contexts, as an agent of dramatic coherence. References to him help present situations, differentiate characters, and unfold dominant themes. Hence, this character used as shaping device comes to constitute a verbal trail that leads to the climactic moment when the family members announce, "El Mayor General."

All the preceding dramatic elements related to the general converge upon his arrival. The entrance of this character and the ensuing dialog has great impact on the over-all structure of the play. The last segment responds to the series of organizing topics in the dialog—entrapment, celebration, the murder plan, and memories—sealing off patterns of interchange. This section complements and completes previous developments. It constitutes a terminus for shaping verbal units in the play.

Given the structural importance of the general, the relation of his arrival on scene to the play's over-all shape merits a closer look. Even before he speaks, a description of him in the segment already responds to all the preparation for his appearance. Emphasis here lies on size and carriage. Throughout the play he has acquired great, almost legendary proportions—as either Petronila's holy protector or Elisiria's ogre. Yet the authorial comment makes him out to be "un hombre pequeño, enjuto, con larga barba de chino" (p. 350). Moreover, his movements are portrayed as "ágiles y elegantes" (p. 350). Physically, at least, the figure does not amount to the impressive or aggressive giant that, respectively, the two sisters see.

Indeed, other touches in the description of the general further demythify this character. We are told that he brings "sobre un brazo la guerrera y sostiene entre los dedos una aguja enorme"; soon, he sits down, "mira a los personajes con una sonrisa indefinible—sarcástica y bondandosa—y comienza a coser unos galones desprendidos de la guerrera" (p. 350). Sewing the loose stripes gives him an air of unexpected domesticity that belie the reputation for grandeur; the size of the needle, moreover, even contributes to a comic impression, as he brandishes this commonplace object like a ludicrous scepter. His attitude towards the characters—critical yet kind—also does not support earlier references. The qualities of the general, then, and his relation to the family begins to be redefined.

Starting with a group of questions and commands, the general displays a desire to channel the dialog, away from ungainly exhibitions and towards meaningful interchange. In urging the family members to speak directly and clearly, there lies an indictment against their obfuscating tendencies, part of the anti-dialectic process. Extending the authorial description, the general's speech shows him to be sarcastically disdainful and kindly patronizing, by turns; though different in tone, these attitudes equally distance him from the other characters. A self-evaluation, however, is also included here; the general says, "¡Oh, perdóname!, sermones no. . . . Esta odiosa manía que tengo. ¿Me disculpan?" (p. 351). The admission of a flaw and the apology become important factors in the humanization of the character. Even the harsh criticism of the family—"parecen animales, bestias"—does not seem so despotical in view of the situation.

The reaction of the family reemphasizes their abject condition, at once fragmented and communal. Characteristic verbal elements summarize surface: anxious questions and admissions of ignorance, obsequious comments and momentary calls for violence, hopeful assertions and declarations of impotence. Petronila's last speech, for instance, embraces her principal concerns—persuasion away from crime, elevation of the dead daughter as a symbol of domesticity—showing a last, desperate effort to save the celebration. This attempt leads to the closing of the play. Mentioning the "copitas de bacarat" and inviting the general to drink, Petronila is using the easily shattered objects, associated with her fragile illusions, to initiate the party. Suspense builds as the characters' questions heighten expectations of a grand lecture. Yet the reunion irreparably falls apart, not due to a rebellion—as we anticipated—but because of the guest of honor himself. The general screams, "¡Basta ya! ¡Aquí tienen! ¡Qué miseria! (De un salto coge la urna y la estrella contra el piso. Los personajes caen fulminados a tierra. Los candelabros se apagan)" (p. 354).

The breaking of the urn responds at once to structural elements that pertain to conformity and to rebellion—that is, both sides of the play's central dialectic. The general destroys Petronila's object of worship and eliminates for Elisiria a source of antagonism. Ultimately, then, it is the landlord who rebels. "¿Hablar?" he says, "Hablar, ¿para qué?" (p. 354). This constitutes a major reversal in the presentation. The person expected to be the victim of a violent plot becomes an agent of contumacy himself. He turns away from the family, asserting

the greater importance of his quotidian activities and diminishes the tenants by pointing out their expendability" "seguiré mi labor. . . . (Mirando a los tres personajes.) Y vendrán otros y vendrán otros y vendrán otros. . . . (Suspira.) Algún día" (p. 354). This final rejection of dialog, in view of the futility of a lecture, constitutes the final manifestation of the anti-dialectic process; here, however, it arises not from disjunctive tendencies but from an awareness of the difficulties that impede meaningful communication. Moreover, the use of future tenses and the vague time expression in the general's lines have an important purpose; they open up dramatic developments, projecting their repetition ad infinitum. The apparent exhaustion of the play's principal aspects, encapsulated and reassessed in the last segment, thus leads to announced reenactment of familial conflicts, leaving little hope for change as long as the tenants' natures remain the same.

As we have seen, the concluding segment has a particularly important function within the over-all structure of the work. On the one hand, it takes up principal shaping strains—that define family members and their views of the situation—and reemphasizes them in summary form. The segment thus becomes a reprise for the whole play, serving much the same purpose as the concluding sections of the sisters' duet and the family trio. More significantly, however, given the role of the general as a leitmotif, his arrival in the segment completes a course of expectation that remains central to the shape of the play. In previous sections, as characters and situation are defined, suspense grows as developments point to the decisive moment when the guest

arrives. We await a rebellious act and its radical but dangerous outcome or the triumph of conformity through the spirit of celebration. The critic Martin Esslin would label this a strategical objective that gives dramas general momentum and direction; thus, a basic function is fulfilled—"the creation of interest and suspense." Esslin further states that "expectations must be aroused but never, until the last curtain, wholly fulfilled."<sup>12</sup> The ending of El Mayor General . . ., however, entails frustration of expected possibilities and a reassessment of characters and situation. Thus, the figure of the general with its role of dramatic determinant—the "central referent" Thomas Van Laan describes<sup>13</sup>—establishes the principal axis in the macro-structure, in relation to which predominant verbal elements may be graphed and traced.

Having considered the interweaving of communicative tendencies—their progression and culmination—in relation to the dominant dramatic presence, we may gain a definitive view of the play's total structure. Traditionally, a drama might be classified according to its most characteristic aspect—the thematic concerns, say, in a play of ideas or the revelation of character in a psychological drama. When dealing with structural features, however, an over-all description of a dramatic work must be based on the predominant types of verbal constituents—their qualities, placement, and accretion. The emerging construct would embrace all facets of a drama: characters, plot, themes, imagery, and so forth. In El Mayor General . . ., we have identified several series of expressive tendencies and analyzed basic dialog patterns throughout the play. Primarily, these present psychological and social

idiosyncracies placing the family members in a problematical environment. Stagnation and denigration are an integral part of their circumstances. What factors determine the characters' abject state and what avenues might lead to a better future remain, then, fundamental formative questions. However, one might approach such substance in the play, structural qualities must be considered. Thus, in a study concerned primarily with images, specifically those related to the Eucharist, Virginia Brownell examines part of the hyperbolic series;<sup>14</sup> Román Vito de la Campa's sociologically oriented analysis of Triana's one-act relies, similarly, on structural terms to describe ritual in a corrupt society.<sup>15</sup>

Considered through its formal characteristics only, then the play's fundamental nature is revealed. The verbal components generally serve to establish and develop conflict, on the one hand—e.g., through opposing assertions and manipulative commands—and to indicate personal deficiencies and alienation, on the other—notably through self-absorbed pauses and incomplete elocutions. These basic expressive tendencies correspond to the wider patterns of interchange. Discordant discussions about principal topics—the celebration, for example, at one extreme, and the homicide, at the other—dominate the dialog. The presentation takes shape through a division of voices into two camps. Thus, the play contains a long, first section structured as duet for the sisters who, respectively, voice conformity and rebellion. When the interchange becomes more complex with the addition of Higinio, the dialectic is extended as he identifies by turns with one of the opposing sides. Finally, however, he remains non-committal, increasing dramatic tension as neither female antagonist gains predominance in an alliance.

As we have also seen, arguments in the play are accompanied by a distancing tendency. Dialog that moves through conflict, but at least keeps characters in contact, becomes encumbered by fragmented speech and self-absorbed elocutions. This anti-dialectic process shows further communicative deterioration, ultimately eliminating any possibility of meaningful interchange. Both basic patterns of dialog—and all the verbal units embraced therein—reach a climactic point with the arrival of the general. The last segment puts all preceding preparation about this central figure into perspective, responding to expectations that built throughout the whole play. The concluding section of the drama entails frustration of the anticipated climax—in the family's failure to take violent action, in the general's refusal to sanction the celebration through a lecture—and also an ultimate assessment of characters and their situation—in relation to views of the general and the possibility for a change in abject circumstances, given the determinant factors. Here, no resolution takes place either through conformist integration of the family or through an effective revolt. With the shift of focus that lets us see events from the general's perspective, the characters emerge as doomed by their psychological idiosyncracies to perpetuate denigrating conditions indefinitely.

The overview of developments in El Mayor General . . . allows us better to apprehend how micro-structural elements coalesce into the over-all dramatic construct. A central line of events in reference to the general creates anticipation which, when contradicted, leaves the work with an open ending. Thus, built-up expectations, frustration



thereof, and projected continuation of circumstances, all come to characterize the macro-structure. This form has important thematic implications. In view of a presentation that, from its momentary features to its general impression, remains dominated by problematic modes of communication, Triana's play emerges as a verbal prison, limiting the characters by virtue of their own shortcomings. Seen from this linguistic perspective—the basis of structural considerations—the work may be taken as an indictment against an especially insidious type of tyranny. Whatever negative conditions might exist in the social environment, an inability to assess surrounding reality in a valid manner and to exchange ideas effectively becomes a fundamental, seemingly inescapable, source of oppression. When in a rare moment of self-awareness, Higinio states, "Somos nosotros. Somos nosotros" (p. 353), he summarizes the family's predicament. Unfortunately, his words are immediately swept away by the usual rush of compulsive lines. Given these detrimental verbal habits, a possible means to initiated liberation through expression and positive interchange is stifled. The mechanisms of speech, the source of dramatic structure, keep on contributing to the denigration of the characters, beyond particular situations, beyond the span of the play.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Román Vito de la Campa, El teatro criollo de José Triana: rito y sociedad cubana (University of Minnesota, Doctoral dissertation, 1975), p. 59.

<sup>2</sup>See page 4 of this study.

<sup>3</sup>See page 9 of this study.

<sup>4</sup>José Triana, El Mayor General hablará de teogonía, in René Leal, ed., Teatro cubano en un acto (Havana: Ediciones Revolución, 1963); all quotes from the play will refer to this edition.

<sup>5</sup>The exact boundaries of these dramatic phases will be defined in the study and appear outlined in the Appendix.

<sup>6</sup>Significant verbal elements, marking the initiation or exhaustion of communicative strains, continue to signal the beginning or the end of segments.

<sup>7</sup>Martin Esslin, An Anatomy of Drama (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 43.

<sup>8</sup>Barry, p. 40 ff.

<sup>9</sup>Virginia Brownell, "The Eucharistic Image as Symbol of the Downfall of Man," Latin American Theatre Review, X, No. 1, pp. 37-43.

<sup>10</sup>Beckerman, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup>Van Laan, p. 221 ff.

<sup>12</sup>Esslin, pp. 43-46.

<sup>13</sup>Van Laan, p. 141.

<sup>14</sup>Brownell, pp. 37 ff.

<sup>15</sup>Campa, pp. 70-71.

## CHAPTER 3 LA NOCHE DE LOS ASESINOS

### Introduction

An analysis of La noche de los asesinos, following the approach established with Triana's one act, will further reveal the mechanisms involved in dramatic presentation. Guiding critical principles can thus be better illustrated. More importantly, however, a structural study of the full-length play lets us consider the author's formative tendencies beyond just one work, providing grounds for comparison. By relating El Mayor General . . . and La noche . . ., then, we may gain a more general view of the playwright's craft.

Before undertaking a detailed examination of the structural elements in La noche . . ., the major boundaries within the play must first be determined. It is important to note that, unlike El Mayor General . . ., there are no divisions in the longer work that can be properly called scenes, at least as defined earlier, according to entrances. Yet, it will be shown that—although the same three characters stay on stage most of the time throughout the drama—devices other than the coming and going of the speakers mark dramatic phases and contribute to the evolvment of the dialog. These strategems entail the conjuring up of various personae; how they operate structurally will later become clear.

Even though La noche de los asesinos does not contain traditional scenes, the play is divided into two acts, separated by a blackout on

stage. These are dependent units, at once structurally coherent within themselves and linked in the total dramatic continuum. Their distinct qualities and their interrelatedness will be delineated in the course of our study. (See Appendix.)

Within each act, five segments of different lengths can be distinguished and singled out for consideration. The play features two levels of reality, the immediate and the imagined; the shift from one to the other of these creates structural boundaries. Yet many more developments among the micro-structural elements also make for segmental divisions, which necessitates the drawing up of sections even within passages that continue at the same level. Exactly how the segments arise as structural entities should become clear throughout the ensuing analysis. But first let us simply list the major divisions in sequence to get a sweeping idea of the total shape of La noche de los asesinos.

In the first act of the play, segments emerge from the alternation of the two levels of reality. The opening segment may be referred to as an initiation, for it mostly serves to lead all the characters towards their playacting (from the beginning to p. 13).<sup>1</sup> When a shift occurs to an imagined reality, Pantaleón's and Margarita's coming to the house, a new section begins: the first visit segment (pp. 13-18). Subtly this moves from the playacting to a discussion of the family situation, which goes through several phases and mostly concentrates on the parents' treatment of their children, especially of Lalo, the only son. Since views here are presented through argument, with only momentary recourse to role-playing, this may be labeled the polemic segment

(pp. 19-31). A pull towards the reinitiation of acting finally wins out, and a long section begins where the characters take up a variety of roles. Due to dramatic chronology and to the sorts of impersonations within the dialog, it seems best to divide this part of the play into two segments: the relatively short knife-sharpening sequence and the more extensive section that leads up to the murder. The former focuses on the public view of events in the household (pp. 31-36); the latter goes through distinctive phases but has the siblings impersonating the parents throughout (pp. 36-49); until Lalo concludes by relating the details of the murder. A brief, punctuating section closes the act, both bringing the characters back to actuality and, then, pointing to further playacting (pp. 51-52).

The second act mostly consists of sections at the imaginative level, with intermittent comments by the characters that reflect upon or resist the role-playing. The first segment again embraces the immediate situation of the siblings and moves them towards starting the next part of their drama, another initiation (pp. 55-62). The remaining part of the play covers the results of the murder and also provides the background to the violent act. Although all this takes place at the same level of reality, playacting, segmentation is still necessary because of the roles taken by the characters. The investigation segment has policemen interrogating Lalo and looking for clues in the house (pp. 62-71). A short, connective segment which requires singling out takes up the writing of the police report and murder confession; through flowing smoothly from and to contiguous sections, this

dictation segment has qualities that make it a distinct structural unit (pp. 72-76). The ensuing trial for murder extends all the way to the conclusion of the play. Throughout here, two sections should be differentiated. The first contains the distinct attorney's address to the court and subsequent questioning of Lalo; the second incongruously involves the mother and father (victims of the crime) as witnesses at their son's trial. These segments, Lalo's (pp. 76-94) and the parents' (pp. 94-109), bring the playacting to a close—at least as much as we are going to see—and lead to the final, punctuating section, back at the level of immediate reality. Our analysis will take us through all the segments and phases of La noche de los asesinos, clarifying the criteria for subdivision.

### Imperatives

In looking at the various structural features of La noche de los asesinos, the definitions of key terms and the critical orientation established earlier will still serve to guide us. Hence, attention must first be focused on the basic units of structure, the principal constructions into which words and phrases are arranged. In La noche . . . these may be assigned to the following groups: imperatives, self-assertions, interrogations, hyperboles, slang and jargon, formulaic phrases, catalogues, reflections upon playacting, and, finally, non-verbal elements. The labels should not necessarily seal off each group, for a particular key construction may fit into more than one category. Immediately, as we identify these micro-structural elements, close similarities with

El Mayor General hablará de teogonía become apparent; the study, then, permits us to view the reemergence of the playwright's characteristic modes of expression in different contexts.

Considering the content of La noche . . ., it is not surprising that imperatives figure predominantly among the word/phrase arrangements. Indeed, since the action mostly involves the string out of family problems through playacting, commands and persuasion that encourage and perpetuate the inside drama, that aim at enforcing certain attitudes and try to establish a particular order of events and of physical reality, all contribute a great deal towards the shaping of Triana's work. The command, "Cierra esa puerta" (p. 3), opens the play, and similarly imperative phrases recur throughout the various setments, making up a unifying strand that is woven into the structure for different purposes.

The most important series of commands in La noche . . . reflects the efforts by the characters to initiate their theater game and, then, to continue it without abatement. Naturally, such imperatives occur most frequently in the initiation segments at the beginning of each act, conveying the prevailing sense of urgency to get on with the private ritual in those stretches of dialog. So, Lalo's command to have the door closed aims at blocking off the playing area, establishing the boundaries of the secluded space where the action is to take place. Henceforth, the role of the brother as director in the first act will manifest itself often through his efforts to get the reluctant sister, Cuca, to join in the drama and to continue in her assigned roles. "Haz lo que te digo" (p. 5), he says to her, defining his part in the

situation by imposing dominance. "Arriésgate" (p. 7), Lalo keeps pushing his sister to participate. Since she persists in her resistance, he tries another ploy: forcing Cuca to defend herself against a transgression, the invitation of the meddling Pantaleón and Margarita, which is part of the playacting fantasy. Lalo taunts: "Si eres nuestra enemiga, enseña tus dientes: muerde. Rebélate" (p. 10). Although his effort to involve Cuca has gotten craftily underhanded, Lalo's mode of expression remains the same, relying for effectiveness on the quick, sharp prick of imperatives.

A contrast to the harsh authoritativeness displayed by Lalo, a milder form of the directorial drive appears among lines that belong to Beba, the other sister. In the movement towards playacting, she has an ancillary role, as a sort of assistant to the director, Lalo. Yet the series of commands is extended through her in a distinctive manner, as she buffers Cuca to some degree from their brother's asperity and tries to win the reluctant young woman over through gentler urging. "No la atormentes," Beba asks of her brother, soon adding, "Déjala un rato" (p. 10). Then, she addresses her sister directly: "Ven, vamos. . . . Sécate esas lágrimas. . . . (En tono muy amable.) No pongas esa cara. Sonríete, chica" (p. 11). Note the palliative effect of that shift from a second person singular to a first person plural command, followed by phrases that nudge Cuca towards regaining her composure. While contributing to set the course of events, Beba at least shows some consideration of her sister's antagonistic feelings. Indeed, as she seems to lead Cuca by the hand into the game, Beba becomes maternal in a succoring



fashion that differs notably from the portrayal of the mother found later in the play.

In conjunction with the use of imperatives to lead up to the drama game, resistance to this direction also arises through the same sort of verbal constructions. "Vete. Déjame tranquila" (p. 5), pleads Cuca at the outset; soon her tone becomes more desperate: "Lalo, no sigas, por favor" (p. 6), "No me atosigues más" When she finally gives in to the playacting, a reaction to an intentionally indolent action by Lalo, Cuca abandons the defensive tone of her previous imperatives—coming from her actual self—and adopts an aggressively sarcastic attitude—already portraying the mother: "Tira, rompe, que tú no eres quien paga" (p. 13). This clearly indicates how linguistic constructions, carried through variations in the play, can serve to structure character. In view of the use of the imperative series in defining roles, then, it is not surprising that Cuca establishes herself as director in the second act by spouting commands reminiscent of Lalo's. She bosses Beba when the latter tries to leave: "Tú te quedas" (p. 56). And, in a display of dominance that seals her role, Cuca pointedly rejects the brother's request, "Tráeme un poco de agua," with firmness, though showing some tenderness: "No, no puede ser. . . . Tienes que esperar" (p. 61). When he insists on obstructing the flow of the drama game, however, saying, "Necesito salir un momento"; Cuca roughly imposes her control of the situation: "(Violenta.) De aquí tú no sales" (p. 61).

Commands that encourage the playacting among the siblings naturally predominate in the initiation segments. Yet, throughout the play, there are further instances in which this series of words and

phrases emerges with a similar purpose. For instance, after the lengthy polemic segment, where Cuca and Lalo present the family situation staying within actuality, the need again arises to reestablish the drama game. Here, all three characters display a typical use of imperatives. After asserting, "Ahora soy yo el que manda" (p. 28), Lalo once more pushes his sister—now physically as well as verbally—to continue with the playacting: "Harás lo que se me antoje. . . . Rápido. Levántate" (p. 29). Cuca also expresses her resistance through commands. Although she starts out by challenging the antagonists—"Búrlense. Ya llegará mi hora, y no tendré piedad" (p. 28)—the reluctant sister is forced into the defensive, "No te acerques. . . . Suéltame," and ultimately has to plead for Beba's assistance, "Ayúdame" (pp. 28-29). It is not surprising when the latter resorts to her conciliatory role, asking of Lalo, "Perdónala" (p. 29). Seeing his intransigence—"No te metas"—she goes into a long lament over the family's constant bickering, which culminates in her own attempt to flee the game arena: "(Decidida.) Me voy. (Lalo la sujeta por un brazo.) Déjame. . . ." (p. 31). The type of coaxing that Lalo then voices nicely illustrates the different relationship he has with this other sister during the play's first act. Instead of repeating the harsh commands he used with Cuca, now the brother-director adopts a milder, persuasive expression. He says, "(Con cierta ternura, aunque firme.) No digas eso" (p. 31), after Beba admits to preferring death over continuing in the same situation. Lalo further urges her: "Si tú quisieras ayudarme, quizás podríamos salvarnos." The tone, of course, recalls the positive

maternalism in Beba's treatment of her sister. Moreover, in that speculation which encourages the direction of the action towards some sort of liberation, we see an effort to bond troubled spirits through a common purpose, highly reminiscent of the Higinio-Elisiria relationship in the murder plan segment of El Mayor General . . . .

It should be noted, in reference to imperative words and phrases associated with the direction of the play, that even when operating within the imaginative level the characters can generate this particular series of structural units. Lalo, for example, impersonating himself in the first visit segment, finds the presence of Margarita and Panta-león unbearable and wishes that phase of the drama to be over. He, therefore, demands of Cuca, "Sácalos de aquí. Quieren averiguar. . . . (Gritando.) Que se vayan al diablo" (p. 16). His impatience soon grows into a frenzy: "Diles que se vayan, Cuca. Diles que se vayan al carajo. (Como si tuviera un látigo y los amenazara.) Fuera, fuera de aquí. A la calle" (p. 17). Cuca resists his command, "No seas gorsero"; but the visitors are, nevertheless, soon gotten rid of, and the polemic segment ensues. The antagonism between the siblings continues in the playacting, being presented through an already established form of expression. In terms of characterization, this lends structural consistency to the play. Furthermore, the occurrence of the same linguistic phenomenon in different contexts greatly enhances dramatic cohesiveness.

Even more striking examples of expressive unity can be found when we examine how the series of imperatives figures in the siblings' impersonations of others. Twice through the polemic segment, Beba's

portrayals of the father are interpolated, serving as a sort of chorus which substantiates compliants by Lalo. This is in keeping with her ancillary role. What should interest us remains the manner in which the portrayed father expresses himself, mostly through imperious future constructions, "Lalo, desde hoy limpiarás los pisos. Zurcirás mi ropa" (p. 23); and later, Lalo, llevarás y plancharás. . . . Limpiarás los orinales. Comerás en un rincón de la cocina. Aprenderás; juro que aprenderás" (p. 25). The parallel between the father and Lalo, in terms of the willful enforcement of a course of action, clearly indicates how the young man, exercising his power toward a supposedly liberating end, merely perpetuates the pattern of command which created the oppressive order he and his sisters aim to change.

The dictatorial tendency in the parents is further illustrated throughout the last segment of the first act, as Cuca and Lalo, impersonating the mother and the father, respectively, bully their sister around. It is true that upon the second arrival of Pantaleón and Margarita, Cuca's tone as the mother considerably sweetens—"Ponte cómoda, nenita. . . . ¿No te molesta esa posición?" (p. 41)—but the positive effect this has vanishes in the wake of the father's commands. He insists that Beba should drink a homemade remedy: "(Empuñando una taza. Obligándola.) Tomátelo. (Beba rechaza la taza.) Quieras o no, te lo tomarás" (p. 43); ironically, even when help is intended, the mode of expression remains debasingly imperative. Not unexpectedly, when the time comes for Lalo to play himself again, angering Cuca as the mother, she responds through lengthy vituperation, including the violent

wishes, "deja eso de la salvación. . . . Ahógate. Muérete" (p. 48). And, similarly, when towards the end of the play brother and sister attack each other (in the roles of the parents come to state their case before the court), they include among their verbal arms aggressive commands aimed at cutting off or diminishing the opponent. "Cállate," Lalo orders his complaining wife (p. 102). She, in turn, repeatedly states with sarcasm phrases like, "Habla. . . . Dilo, dilo todo. Vomítalo . . ." (p. 104); of course, Cuca's desires are the opposite of her words.

To complete our examination of the structuring series of commands, we should look at these in the drawing of other impersonated characters. It is especially revealing to consider the police investigation and, later, the judge's role during the trial "scene." Having come upon Lalo, for instance, the sisters as the policemen establish their control of the situation through orders, the first verbal contact with the suspect; first, Beba, "De pié, vamos, rápido"; then, Cuca, "Vamos, levántese" (p. 64). They continue along this line, trying to get Lalo to relate the details of the murder: "Responde, que te conviene," urges Cuca (p. 65). Ultimately, the investigation leads up to the typing up of the confession, which culminates in Cuca's demand, "Firme aquí" (p. 74). The imperatives set the course of the dialog which obstinately sweeps Lalo towards an admission of guilt. The system of law enforcement, then, displays at the level of society-at-large the same pattern of oppression found within the family.

The same expressive tendency shown by Lalo and Cuca in their various impersonations extends through the secondary role of Beba as the

judge in the trial segments. Although Cuca has taken up the function of the director in the second half of the play, Beba helps guide courtroom events from the background. Naturally, she resorts to properly authoritarian statements that help present a parody of the justice system. For instance, Beba orders initially: "Ruego al público que mantenga la debida compostura y silencio, o de lo contrario, tendré que desalojar las sala y continuar las sesiones a puertas cerradas. (A Cuca.) Tiene la palabra el señor fiscal" (p. 76). The detailed nature of the commands, drawing up the image of a rowdy public, enriches the fantasy and locks players—and audience—more securely within it. Of course, Beba continues to enforce similar orders upon court proceedings, as when she reprimands Lalo: "El procesado debe ser más exacto en sus respuestas. . . . El Tribunal espera que el procesado acate, en el mejor sentido, estas exigencias de orden . . ." (p. 83). This ties in at an imaginative phase with all those other commands that aim to determine the course of the dialog. In fact, when Lalo and Cuca begin to deviate from the "scene" by stepping out of character, Beba must unwaveringly demand: "¡Orden! ¡Silencio! Pido a los señores de la sala que guarden la debida compostura . . ." (p. 94). These orders provide one of those important points of contact between the play's two levels of reality. In the tension between dissolution and continuation of the game, we can more clearly perceive its meaning and importance to Lalo and his sisters. The playacting may become unbearable, an excruciating recreation of the most negative aspects of societal or family life; yet, to abandon the private drama or to ignore the rules of ritual would mean forfeiting the possibility of transcendence.

We have seen how as a series of structuring units different types of commands, put to various uses, serve to present the world of Triana's play. At times, these are harsh (Lalo's) or stern (the judge's) or mild (Beba's); at times, the commands emerge to direct the course of the drama or to help delineate a character. On the whole, the frequency of imperative constructions indicates a constant struggle between forces of oppressive order and resistant elements. An observation by Matías Montes Huidobro—that the parents figure in Triana's play as symbols of "una autoridad maligna . . . implacable" and that this sort of authority is general in society as a dehumanizing mechanism—can be substantiated by considering the role of commands in the drama.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, seeing how a dictatorial mode of expression connects different facets of the play not only reveals a unifying technical element. As the parents, the children, the police, and the judges, all perpetuate an authoritarian spirit, sharing a linguistic tendency to impose orders, a statement arises about the universality of oppression in the world these characters inhabit. Fatalistically, today's victims become tomorrow's oppressors.

#### Assertions and Negations

In our examination of imperative statements throughout La noche de los asesinos, we saw how the characters exhibited a need to exert control over one another, to exercise whatever power they possessed within their oppressive situation. Commands served as an escape valve yet, unfortunately, also perpetuated the very climate that restricted and denigrated the siblings. Out of the same social, familial, and psychological atmosphere there arises still another series of expressive

elements which helps to shape the play. This entails special affirmations and negative constructions. The present set of structural units appears closely related to the imperative series. Both groups, developing through all the segments, unify the constituent levels of reality in the play, the actual and the imaginary.

When we look at assertive statements and negations as they occur in different contexts and with various functions, the characteristic features of these structuring constructions slowly emerge. In general, the affirmations relate to actions supposedly taken or soon to be taken. Here a spirit of determination prevails: characters assert themselves, through whatever means are available, reacting desperately to the surrounding reality, which tends to wear away at their egos. In so far as these assertions delineate a course of action—presumably liberating—they recall the murder plans drawn up by Elisiria and Higinio in El Mayor General . . .. Moreover, as in the one-act, where Petronila offers resistance to her companions' machinations, La noche . . . also contains a sequence of structural units that counter the thrust towards action. These give rise to expressions of doubt, incapability, and impotence. It must be further pointed out that negative constructions sometimes function similarly to assertions; with refusals or denials, the individual may equally manifest his views, make his feelings known. Together, affirmations and negations serve to draw up more clearly the idiosyncrasies of characters, at the same time helping to reveal the peculiarities of setting and situation that seem so formative and so adverse.



Looking more closely at these structural units, we discover that, as with commands, one of their important functions is to perpetuate or direct the drama game. At the very beginning of the play, once Lalo has ordered the closing off of the performance space, Beba flatly asserts: "La representación ha empezado" (p. 3). And soon she brands this as a commonplace occurrence, "Mira que tú eres. . . . ¡Como si esto fuera nuevo!" (p. 3), chiding Cuca for being surprised at the proceedings. At this point, all the discordant qualities—unusual behavior presented with matter of factness, the strange coupled with the ordinary—establishes tension and creates suspense. Interest is stirred about the conduct of the characters within this peculiar world, as their involvement with the drama game begins to unfold.

Beyond the initial statements that officially inaugurate the playacting, other assertive phrases by the characters further encourage or discourage the game. For instance, in order to get the reluctant Cuca to play along, Lalo not only pours forth commands but also taunts and accuses her so as to get a reaction, thus absorbing her into the fantasy. He scorns Cuca for having invited Pantaleón and Margarita: "Entonces, fue ella. (Señala a Cuca.) Ella" (p. 8). Lalo elaborates, trying to sweep his sister further towards the game through an antagonistic encounter, participation in a "scene." Yet Cuca can only assert herself timidly and defensively at first; she says, "(Llena de miedo, no sabe cómo meterse en situación.) Yo, Lalo, yo . . . a la verdad que. . . . (Bruscamente.) No la cojas conmigo" (p. 9). The unfinished phrase recalls those of El Mayor General . . ., here also serving to

reveal the weakness of the character. True, she manages to come up with a command and later affirms, "(Tratando de seguir en situación. Con cierta soberbia.) Son mis amigos" (p. 10). But the defensive rather than aggressive nature of Cuca's statements, a variation within the structural sequence, helps to underline the difference between her role and Lalo's in this section.

Already in the first act, Cuca projects herself towards a future moment in the private ceremony when she will have more power. Towards the end of the polemic segment, a need again arises to re-establish the drama game; Cuca then warns, having been humiliated in her attempt to escape: "Búrlense. Ya llegará mi hora y no tendré piedad." She quickly follows this up with, "Haré lo que me dé la gana" and, resisting Lalo, "Tú no me mandas" (p. 28). The rebellion, however, proves to be short lived, for Lalo unwaveringly reasserts his role as the present leader: "Ahora soy yo el que manda. . . . Harás lo que yo diga. . . . Harás lo que se me antoje" (pp. 28-29). This sharp consciousness of the proper execution of the drama game—of acting in a correct manner at a specific time—was also behind some commands and, again, points to the importance of reduplication in the proceedings, giving them the solemnity of a secret ritual that aims at transcendence.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, when Cuca gets her turn to direct, during the second act, she exhibits the same ruthless aggressiveness characteristic of Lalo at first. Presenting this new role, a series of forceful assertions is added to the imperatives Cuca spouts. The second act begins with her saying, "(A Beba.) Míralo. (A Lalo.) Así quería verte. (Riéndose.)

Ahora me toca a mí. (Largas carcajadas.)" (p. 55). Now, it is she who attacks him, as he hesitates to go on but has to acquiesce: "Oiga jovencito, lo que voy a decir: tenemos que seguir. No te piensas que esto se va a quedar a medias como otras veces. Estoy cansada de que siempre quede pendiente" (p. 55). He reacts with: "Sí, sí. . . . Lo que tú dispongas" (p. 56). The reversal of roles is reflected here by the interchange of verbal tendencies; indeed, such repetition of a structural unit in a different context towards a particular dramatic end—in this case, delineating character, showing behavioral bonds—substantiates comments by Bernard Beckerman and Thomas Van Laan about the use of variance in reiteration of elements as a shaping device.<sup>4</sup>

The strand relating to continuation of the drama game in a set direction is again picked up when Cuca retorts after her brother's surrender, "Lo que yo disponga, no; lo que tiene que ser" (p. 56). As director in this section, the once reluctant sister now insures participation and proper execution of the ceremony. She not only orders Lalo about but also the hesitant Beba, determined that the latter has to "llegar hasta el final" (p. 57). In fact, Cuca adopts her brother's sly device to get Beba to play along, criticizing her in character, "(Como la madre.) ¡Buena perla me has salido tú!" (p. 58). Truly, throughout this section Cuca exhibits great verve, determined to exert her power as a desperately needed release; notice her forceful language: "No puedas negarte. . . . Nada puede fallar. . . . Yo sé lo que hago" (p. 59).

The drive to follow a specific path throughout the drama game is further evident when Lalo and his sisters are well into their

"scenes." Cuca, for instance, reacts to her brother's effective defense during the trial with this accusation: "(Violenta.) Me voy. Estás jugando sucio" (p. 94). When he insists, "Hay que llegar al final. . . . Tú también has tratado de aprovecharte," this shows that variations have emerged in the course of the playacting, slight alterations instituted for expediency. Yet Cuca reasserts, "Lo que has hecho es imperdonable. Cada uno a su parte, fue lo convenido." Finally, it is Beba who, in character as the judge, establishes order again: "¡Orden! ¡Silencio!"

In relation to the drama game, it can then be said that the characters exhibit an assertiveness that gives them a sense of purpose. In the set of verbal structures examined here, the authoritativeness of the siblings reflects a need to satisfy a yearning for some power and effectualness. This is seen in the aggressive enforcement of direction in the playacting but also in a counter defensive mode, through attempts at leaving, abstaining from or personally molding the drama game. True, such assertiveness seems to substitute for more meaningful control over personal destiny. Given the familial situation and the psychological state of the characters, the future must remain primarily open not to the possibility of some significant change in circumstances but to the continuation of the drama game. Beba's final punctuating assertion guarantees this beyond the duration of the play before us: "Está bien. Ahora me toca a mí" (p. 110).

In La noche . . ., yet another series of assertions and associated negations figures as a release mechanism for the characters—a

substitute for true self-realization. These structural units relate to the physical appearance of the family house, pertaining to the reorganization of items in the household according to a peculiar set of specifications. Such concern with the arrangement of decor is reminiscent of El Mayor General . . . and, in a way, also appears here as an aspect of ritual—that is the special placement of objects. In La noche . . ., since the ritual involves playacting, a parallel may be drawn between the characters' concern with house decor and a director's preoccupation with the distribution and handling of props and parts of the set. The parallel is quite evident in Lalo's directorial assertions, as when he states, trying to initiate the drama game: "En esta casa el cenicero debe estar encima de una silla y el florero en el suelo" (p. 5). Cuca having asked about the placement of the chairs, he further asserts that they go "encima de las mesas." Lalo even perceives a position for the characters, albeit figurative: "Flotamos con los pies hacia arriba y la cabeza hacia abajo" (p. 5).

Cuca, too, establishes her role as director through similar assertions. At the beginning of the second act, she tells Beba: "Pon el cuchillo en su sitio. . . . Así no. . . . Anda, cada cosa en su sitio" (p. 58). It should be mentioned that just as Cuca uses this sort of verbal tendency aggressively, she also relies on it to counteract Lalo's dictates. At first, she tries to delay the drama game with, "Hay que arreglar esta casa. . . . El cenicero debe estar en la mesa y no en la silla" (pp. 4-5). Further on, she keeps upholding the parental idea of the proper arrangement of household items: "En una casa, los

muebles . . ." (p. 21); this particular assertion is debilitated by Lalo's interruption, reminiscent of the ineffectiveness of characters in El Mayor General . . ., whose words often break off in ellipses. This weakness in Cuca's assertion is in keeping with her submissive role during the first act.

References to the placement of objects in the house are significant beyond their relation to the drama game; this is especially true when one considers, along the same line, assertions about the function of rooms. The latter type of statement in particular seems to act as a substitute for truly effective action, a move towards a change. In relation to the need for some sort of alteration in the familial status quo, the concern with household arrangement may seem like a superficial obsession. Yet, for Lalo, the very capriciousness of his recommendations stems from a deep-seated desperation, an anxious desire for release. This becomes quite evident during the trial scene, in statements by both Lalo and Cuca as the other. There, he describes the genesis of his verbal "game"—repeated, eccentric assertions about household arrangements—emphasizing its defensive nature:

Por momentos estaba tentado . . . pero, no . . . no . . . ¿irme de la casa?, ini pensarlo! Ya sabía a lo que estaba sometido . . . siempre tuve que regresar y siempre decía que no lo volvería a hacer. Ahora estaba decidido a no reincidir en esa loca aventura. . . . ¡Todo, menos eso! Entonces se me metió en la cabeza que debía arreglar esta casa a mi manera, disponer. . . . La sala no es la sala, me decía. La sala es la cocina. El cuarto no es el cuarto. El cuarto es el inodoro. (Pausa breve.) ¿Que otra cosa podía hacer? Si no era esto, debía destruirlo todo, todo; porque todos eran cómplices y conspiraban contra mí y sabían mis pensamientos. . . . (p. 92)

Note how the structure of the language reflects Lalo's frustration, his impotence; the unfinished phrases, the reiterated negatives—recalling similar constructions in El Mayor General . . .—present the structuring element that runs counter and yet is inextricably tied to the assertions that follow. Skillfully, the form of the speech parallels the situation related here, the verbal game substituting for effective action, considered only in terms of violence. Lalo thus emphasizes the protective nature of his assertions, their role as a defense mechanism.

The mother, on the other hand, points to the offensive effect of her son's verbal tendency. As Cuca tells the sergeant:

Un día se le metió entre ceja y ceja que debíamos arreglar la casa a su antojo. . . . Yo, al oír aquel disparate, me opuse terminantemente. Su padre puso el grito en el cielo. ¡Pero, qué cosa es eso? Ay, Ud. no se imagina. . . . El cenicero encima de la silla. El florero en el suelo. ¡Qué horror! Y luego se ponía a cantar a todo meter, corriendo por toda la casa: "La sala no es la sala. La sala es la cocina." Yo, en estos casos, me hacía la sorda, como si oyera llover. (p. 96)

The last line indicates that she focuses on the irritating effect of her son's phrases, without even trying to apprehend their purpose—an indication of the deteriorated relationship among family members.

Given the tie between the need for change and assertions regarding household arrangements, small wonder that as Cuca and Lalo, impersonating the parents, reach the exasperated climax of their clash—a pouring forth of conjugal woes—Beba starts repeating her brother's phrases; this choral background becomes an anthem of despair: "Hay que quitar las alfombras. Vengan abajo las cortinas. La sala no es la sala.

La sala es la cocina. El cuarto no es el cuarto. El cuarto es el inodoro. . . . Ayy. . . . ¡Hay que tumbar esta casa!" (p. 108).

Thus, even in the verbal game, destruction ultimately emerges as a solution.

Although the assertions about household arrangement figure as a cry for change, a needed release, such determination, as long as it remains at the verbal, even figurative level, is haunted by a sad air of futility. Yet the only solution offered beyond the drama and verbal games is the most drastic: murdering the parents. This is presented in conjunction with a whole series of assertions arising from a critical spirit, an assessment of the familial situation. Hence, these verbal units serve further to delineate the characters and reveal the atmosphere that envelops them. Compared to other forceful statements, these assertions would seem as the more vital instruments for change, at least allowing for the airing of complaints. This focus on problems, however, merely leads to the pros and cons of the murder, not unlike the drawing up of plans for homicide in El Mayor General. . . .

In La noche . . . , the series of assertions relating to the murder is found mostly throughout the "polemic segment" of the first act and during the trial scene of the second. In the former section, Cuca and Lalo, having momentarily abandoned the playacting, examine their situation, discussing the possibility of deliverance. "Siempre hay que jugársela," states Lalo, initiating the discussion: "No importa ganar o perder" (p. 19). As Cuca voices opposition to her brother's determined statements, the dialog moves towards an indictment against



the parents. Beba asks her brother why he is so critical of their parents, laying all the blame for the family situation on them; he answers, "Porque ellos me hicieron un inútil" (p. 22). He further expresses a need for liberation, always identifying exterior factors as the cause for his denigrating state—an echo of Elisiria complaining in El Mayor General. . . . Lalo's protest culminates with a cry for self-determination: "Quiero que las cosas tengan un sentido verdadero, que tú, Beba, y yo podamos decir: 'Hago esto'; y lo hagamos. Si queda mal: 'Es una lástima. Trataré de hacerlo mejor.' Si queda bien: 'Pues, ¡qué bueno! A otra cosa mariposa.' Y hacer y rectificar y no tener que estar sujeto a imposiciones ni pensar que tengo la vida prestada, que no tengo derecho a ella" (p. 24).

All throughout this, Cuca presents an opposing voice, rationalizing her parents' behavior, negating Lalo's assertions. "Todos los padres hacen lo mismo," she states. "Eso no significa que tú tengas que virar la casa al revés" (p. 24). And to the cry for liberation, she reacts with, "No podemos. No podemos" (p. 25). This clearly recalls Petronila's resigned acquiescence to the state of affairs under the general's vigilance. Cuca, in fact, is most adamant in her rejection of Lalo's rebellion, sharing his verbal tendency—strong, determined statements—but to an opposite end. Structurally, this establishes the proper counterpoint.

What is ultimately proposed in this discussion remains ambiguous. Yes, Lalo expresses determination to go on with the private ritual, enacting through it the murder of the parents. Yet there is no clear

statement to indicate definite intent to carry out the homicide, although it is hinted that this might be the next step beyond the drama game. Just as in El Mayor General . . ., where the assertive language of the murder plan segment deteriorates towards the confrontation with the general, at the conclusion of the polemic segment Lalo's words weaken into uncertainty regarding his fate: "No sé; aunque, quizás . . ." (p. 27).

During the trial scene, Lalo continues with his accusations of the parents, an extension of the expression exhibited earlier, only now it has a heightened paranoid tone. Asked why he killed his parents, Lalo responds, "Yo me sentía perseguido, acosado. . . . No me dejaban tranquilo un minuto" (p. 82). This is accompanied by still another declaration of his desire for freedom: "Yo quería, anhelaba, deseaba desesperadamente hacer cosas por mí mismo" (p. 86). Indeed, the section includes an explanation of the yearning for murder, the extreme way out: "Yo sabía que lo que los viejos me ofrecían no era, no podía ser la vida. Entonces, me dije: 'Si quieres vivir tienes que . . .'" (pp. 89-90). Soon the verbal game regarding household arrangement would not do as a release mechanism—"Mata a tus padres." La casa entera, todo, me exigía ese acto heroico" (p. 94). Although this is the culmination of the series of assertions related to taking a liberating course of action, notice how even in such forceful language responsibility is relegated to the exterior of the individual, indicative of the diminution of personal identity present throughout the play.

When the siblings impersonate the parents during the trial, taking up another discussion of the familial situation, the same verbal

characteristics previously exhibited reemerge but with a sharper tone—assertions turned into harsh accusations. Cuca, as the mother, bursts upon the scene with a demand for equal time: "Exijo una revisión de todo el proceso. . . . Yo deseo declarar. . . . Reclamo que se haga justicia en nuestro caso" (p. 95). What begins as a diatribe against the son develops into a vituperative dialog between the parents as Lalo formulates a counterattack, playing the role of the father; "Ella miente, señor juez. . . . Es cierto lo que digo. . . . Yo, como padre, a veces he sido culpable. Y ella también" (p. 101). All the way towards the conclusion of the play, the atmosphere remains onerously charged with the claims and counterclaims of the parents. Yet the characters are unable to reach any viable solution to their conflicts, although the acerbic exchange does seem to have the value of an exorcism for the siblings. Ultimately, the verve the parents exhibit ends up in a frustrated fizzle. Once more, the attenuation of the series of assertions leaves no hope for renovating action; "Pero ya estamos viejos y no podemos. Estamos muertos," states the father, surrendering, while the mother explodes with an exasperated curse, "Ojalá se murieran los tres" (p. 108).

We can see how, considered together, the different manifestations of assertiveness in La noche . . . share structural functions beyond their particular dramatic purposes. Whether assertive statements emerge in relation to the drama ritual or tied to a verbal game regarding household arrangement or as part of an assessment of and protest against an oppressive reality; this verbal tendency serves to present character—within the mold of circumstances yet militating against that very

environment which suppresses individual fulfillment. The reiteration of verbal structures in different contexts relates characters, develops situation; thus, a mode of expression serves to unify facets of a play, helping to create a coherent dramatic universe.

### Interrogations

In La noche de los asesinos a third series of constructions appears closely tied to commands and assertions; these are interrogations. They, too, serve to present the idiosyncrasies of characters and situation and emerge in different contexts yet with a special significance beyond specific functions. Questions may be grouped into general categories, according to dramatic purpose; such divisions indicate continuous verbal strands that markedly contribute to the play's texture.

Examining the contexts in which interrogations arise, we find that they function partially as steps towards the orientation of the individual in a hostile environment yet also as an aggressive tool. Again, here is another mechanism of defense as well as offense. Such positive and negative roles should be reminiscent of how the same verbal tendencies in El Mayor General . . . contributed both to a dialectic and to an anti-dialectic process. Together, the different types of questions help graph characters on a peculiar plane, revealing their psychological idiosyncracies in a troubled, stagnant world.

At a superficial level, questions in La noche . . . relate to the mechanics of the drama game and, thus, they are linked with commands and assertions. At the very beginning of the ritual, Cuca asks,

"¿Y eso? . . . ¿Otra vez?" (p. 3); this may just seem like one of her delay tactics, but it also stirs dramatic interest and establishes the repetitiousness of the goings-on. Later, Lalo's questions—"¿Han llegado los invitados? . . . ¿Quien les avisó?" (p. 8)—continue the drama game along a specific course, opening the sequence that contains a visit by Pantaleón and Margarita. Then, right before the section dealing with gossip, Beba asks her brother, "¿Vas a repetir la historia?" (p. 31). Hence, questions from all the characters mark off points in the proceedings, as some important phase is about to be entered. This serves as a sort of dramatic punctuation. Appropriately, the first act concludes with Cuca's question, "¿Y eso?" which her sister answers, "La primera parte ha terminado."

Throughout the second act, questions play a similar role in relation to the drama game, except that now they emerge most frequently as a part of impersonations. For instance, warming up for the interrogation segment, Beba states: ". . . dentro de unos momentos empezarán las investigaciones y los interrogatorios. ¿Hizo usted eso? . . . ¿No lo hizo? . . . ¿Cómo es posible?" (p. 57); rehearsing this inquisitiveness helps get her into character, which shows still another of the many theatrical elements that are an integral aspect of the play. Ensuring the proper execution of roles, Cuca presses her sister at one point: "¿Qué? ¿No estás conforme? ¿Quieres meter la cuchareta . . . ? . . . ¿Tienes algo que añadir? . . . ¿Pretendes tomar partido? . . . " (p. 60).

The function of questions as markers also continues in the second act. For instance, an astounded Cuca demands, "¿Cómo te atreves?"

at the moment that Lalo begins to impersonate the father as a defense (p. 101). This questioning of an action also emphasizes the distance between individuals, showing uncertainty about another's motivation, ignorance of a companion's needs. The tendency occurs till the end, where probing into another character brings the play to its conclusion, helping to dissipate tension and projecting towards future action, as Beba questions her sister: "¿Cómo te sientes . . . ¿Estás satisfecha? . . . ¿De veras? . . . ¿Estás dispuesta, otra vez? . . . ¿No te sorprendió que pudiera?" (p. 109).

Hence, beyond their emergence in conjunction with the drama game—primarily fulfilling a mechanical function—questions also reveal the yearnings of the characters, their desire for orientation within circumstances that impede individual satisfaction. There are, therefore, a series of interrogations that arise solely from the siblings' need to uncover mutual feelings, to search for solidarity in sentiment, action, and experience.

At the beginning of the play, seeing Cuca's reluctance to join in the proceedings, Lalo tries to discover her point of view. "¿Cómo? ¿Considerás un crimen una bobería? . . . ¿Es cierto que piensas así? . . . ¿Entonces qué cosa para tí es importante?" (p. 4). There is indeed some taunting here, but the questions seem aimed primarily at establishing communication; as such, they recall the verbal units that contribute to a dialectic process in El Mayor General . . . . Throughout the polemic segment, airing polarized attitudes about the family situation and the need for change, questions remain a principal form of

presentation. Lalo keeps asking, "¿Qué importa esta casa, qué importan estos muebles si nosotros no somos nada? . . . (A Cuca.) ¿Eres tú acaso un florero? ¿Te gustaría descubrir un día que eres realmente eso? . . ." (p. 21). Cuca, on her behalf, insists: "Pero, ¿por qué te ensañas con papá y mamá? ¿Por qué les echas toda la culpa?" (p. 22); here she clearly represents the parents' side. Tied to the need for self-determination exposed through assertions, questions in the polemic segment move towards the call for change. As Lalo puts it to Cuca, "¿No has pensado nunca lo que significa que tu puedas pensar, decidir y hacer las cosas por tu propia cuenta?" (p. 24). Finally, Lalo's resolution is presented as answers to his sister. "¿Te rebelas?" she asks; he replies, "Sí." She continues: "¿Contra ellos?" "Contra todo," he affirms (p. 25).

Interrogations cut across the play's levels of reality—like other verbal tendencies—appearing not only in the characters' discussions about themselves but also in their impersonations. Hence, within the drama ritual, the family's needs are equally revealed. Through impersonations, they still aim to uncover old wounds, to sound out conflicting attitudes. So, Lalo and Cuca, playing their parents, resort to mutual questioning. He, for instance, challenges the behavior of the mother, "¿Y tú qué has hecho? Dime, ¿qué has hecho conmigo? ¿Y con ellos?" and further prods her feelings: "Ponte la mano en el corazón y respóndeme, ¿me has querido alguna vez?" (p. 105). The theme of fulfillment through self-determination is again picked up when Lalo directs a question towards himself as the father: "¿Por qué no viviste

plenamente cada uno de tus pensamientos, cada uno de tus deseos?" (p. 107). This question shows that once more the problems of one generation resonate in the next.

Cuca as the mother partially formulates her defense through questions. "Y tú, ¿qué querías que hiciera? . . . ¿Tenía yo acaso la culpa? ¿Yo? . . . ¿Qué querías que hiciera?" (pp. 107-108). The challenge to her husband represents the culmination of a confrontation meant to bring out differences, define the reasons for conflict. The siblings thus attempt to analyze their parents' relationship, with all that it implies for the family situation, through the drama ritual. Yet, though putatively salutary, no matter how urgent the questions are, they do not positively lead towards resolution of internecine struggles. Despair and defeat, seemingly the most characteristic states in this familial world, turn out to be the inexorable product of the parents' interchange. The acting out of a failure in communication serves both to present the condition of the marriage, providing necessary background information, and to show how the children view their elders, marking the negative effects of adult conflicts.

The joining of levels of reality in the play through an expressive tendency can also be seen when questioning emerges as a verbal weapon. In the previously examined type of manifestation, questions at least arose from a thrust towards communication, even if they did not lead towards harmony or understanding at the actual and imaginary levels. Questioning, however, also figures as a method of control and oppression. For instance, when the father interrogates the children, he aims



not to understand them better but to manage their behavior; this is apparent when Beba impersonates him: "Lalo, ¿qué has estado haciendo? ¿Y esa cara? ¿Por qué me miras así? Dime, ¿con quién anduviste? ¿Y esos cuchillos? ¿Qué vas a hacer? Responde. ¿Te has tragado la lengua? ¿Por qué has llegado tarde?" (p. 36). The same sort of questioning continues to be the most characteristic form of expression used by Beba in her portrayal, summarized by the inquiry, "¿Tú te has creído que te gobiernas? ¿Crees que voy a dejar que te gobiernes?" (p. 36). Thus, the unwillingness of the ruling power to grant the personal freedom necessary for self-determination once again surfaces. The father acts in the same tyrannical way towards Beba—"¿Así que te has levantado y vestido y le has enseñado los pantalones a un montón de mataperros? ¿Será posible?" (p. 40)—and the mother also shares this denigrating verbal tendency—"¿Lo cogiste? ¿Lo gastaste? ¿Lo perdiste?" (p. 38)

In the first act, when as the father Lalo accosts Beba with aggressive questions then presses her to admit guilt—"¿Es cierto lo que dice tu madre? Confiesa, anda" (p. 39)—he is foreshadowing the police investigation. The father's questions do not seem aimed at discovering the truth but rather at debilitating the girl into confessing her crime. Likewise, the criminal justice system as portrayed in the second act does not function to impart fair treatment of the accused but to coerce from him an admission of guilt. In fact, the way the system is presented in the play, starting with the investigation and moving through the trial, not only is inexcusable criminality a foregone

conclusion but the mechanisms of justice themselves seem to be part of the punishment of the accused. Interrogations here merely push the defendant along a course of humiliation towards defeat.

Examining how questions help present a negative view of justice in society, one can look at how the policemen conduct their interrogation. "Este es un delincuente de marca mayor. Seguramente robó primero; y luego, no satisfecho, decidió matarlos. (A Lalo.) ¿A tus padres, no? . . . ¿Los envenenaste? . . . ¿Cuántas pastillas . . . ?" Beba starts off and then continues, while Cuca backs her up: "¿Por qué los mataste? . . . ¿Te maltrataban?" (pp. 65-66). Sure of Lalo's criminality, the investigating officers try to ascertain the murder method: "¿Los ahogaste con las almohadas? . . . ¿Cuántas puñaladas les diste? . . . Cinco, diez, quince?" (p. 67). Their insistence is summed up by, "¿Cómo lo hiciste? ¿Por qué lo hiciste?" (p. 69). . This oppressive verbal tendency extends the tyranny of the parents beyond the family unit, spanning a whole network of denigrating social structures.

Later in the play, throughout the tidal wave of rhetoric poured forth by the prosecuting attorney in the trial scene, a series of questions helps characterize the process of law. Rather than lead towards clarification, these mainly figure as empty postulations or even vicious indictments. There is, for example, the lawyer's attempt to define justice: "¿Puede y debe burlarse a la justicia? ¿La justicia no es la justicia? ¿Si podemos burlarnos de la justicia, la justicia no deja de ser la justicia? ¿Si debemos burlarnos de la justicia, es

la justicia otra cosa y no la justicia?" (p. 77). The very nature of the questions mocks any intent to take the proceedings seriously. Although this agent of the law appears with buffoon characteristics, he is nevertheless evil in his violation of the spirit of justice, remaining absorbed in his own rhetoric rather than concerned with the fate of the humans involved. Such lack of consideration for the humanity of the accused further shows up in the execrations, "¿No siente repulsión cualquier criatura frente a este detritus, frente a esta rata nauseabunda, frente a este escupitajo deleznable? ¿No se siente la necesidad del vómito y del impropio?" (p. 80). Thus, questions are used against their proper purpose, perversely formulated as implements of aggression and obfuscation.

Again, examining the emergence of questions as structural units, we see how a particular expressive element helps draw connections between situations, creating an all-embracing picture of society. Through this verbal tendency, similarities are revealed at the level of character, in the need for orientation and solidarity, in the obsession with control. In the family, the children use questions in the discussion of their situation, in plotting action; the parents interrogate the children to keep them in line and confront each other with painful inquiries. In the external world, represented by its police and legal institutions, questions arise as a mechanism of oppression. Thus, this expressive tendency at once develops from and envelopes each individual. Questions, then, like the frequent commands and forceful assertions, help to present beyond their structuring of character a

whole dramatic world. From psychological quirks to social institutions, a wide perspective on various aspects of a degenerate society can be gained through a single formal device.

### Commonplace Expressions

Whereas the previously examined structural units—commands, assertions, questions—all entailed specific types of grammatical constructions—the imperative, the affirmative, the interrogative—another series of shaping elements contributes to the texture of La noche de los asesinos primarily at the level of diction. These embrace such specialized types of speech as colloquialisms, jargon, conversational formulas, and vituperation. In our consideration of these expressive tendencies again we must examine their particular manifestations, analyzing dramatic function and significance.

The different kinds of special diction we have identified vary in content and context. At times, colloquialisms emerge as platitudinal reflections on life, guidelines to behavior; at times, they move into the area of insults, linking with the acrimonious strain in the play. Jargon and conversational formulae come to characterize particular individuals and social relationships, lending them linguistic identity. Together, all these expressive elements affect the generic nature of the play, stamping it with a sort of "local color"; hence, no matter how peculiar the characters and events are on the one hand, no matter how existentially significant they are on the other, both singular and universal aspects of the drama become inextricably interwoven with regionalist strands.

Let us first look at some colloquial expressions that help present the perspective of the characters, their assessment of situations and companions. These verbal elements are colorful and even funny, albeit commonplace and often superficial. All the characters, as themselves or in their impersonations, show this expressive tendency which emerges with different functions throughout the play. Among the various colloquialisms, we find warnings, platitudinal pronouncements, and criticism.

Typical of the traditional warnings used by the characters, we have Cuca's, "No le busques más los cinco pies al gato" (p. 5), directed against Lalo as part of her resistance to the drama game. And, a little later, Beba tells Cuca in turn not to taunt their brother, "No lo pinches que salta" (p. 12). Of course, these tie in with the series of commands yet reveal, more than an imperious spirit, a reliance on traditional phrases as tools with which to handle people and situations. This tendency is even more markedly apparent in some reflections about life that show the characters' share of common wisdom. "No hay peor sordo que el que no quiere oír," Lalo remarks, faced with Cuca's complacent attitude. She counters his viewpoint with, "Una cosa es decir y otra vivir" (p. 6). The emergence of such platitudes does not reach major proportions as in El Mayor General . . . where Petronila is largely drawn up through her banalities. Yet the presence of aphorisms remains significant, for it associates the siblings, through their speech habits, with a specific linguistic community. Hence, no matter how bizarre their behavior and situation might be, the characters still share a

part of the identity of the common man. Strange private rituals and idiosyncratic individuals remain tied to the ordinary world; this gives more dimension to Triana's presentation, stretching the relevancy of his statements over society at large.

More frequent than warnings and platitudes, critical assessments appear in La noche . . ., showing perspective on people and events through colloquial language. These range from the colorfully amusing to the harshly abrasive. Indeed, the spirit of conflict that prevails in the play often arises through a series of insults. Starting with Beba's early comment on her sister, "Tú estás en Babia" (p. 3), all the characters indulge in mutual criticism, thus defining their relationship through personal differences. Lalo, for instance, preambles a bit of advice to his uncooperative sister with: "esto métetelo en esa cabeza de chorlito que tienes . . ." (p. 6); and at a more exasperated moment, he tells her, "¡Qué comebolas eres!" (p. 11). Cuca, in turn, resists her brother's rebellion with: "Bien dice papá que eres igual que los gatos, que cierras los ojos para no ver la comida que te dan" (p. 27). Though they show individual points of view, the characters' reliance on commonplace criticism puts them all in the same linguistic fraternity.

The critical tendency is carried into the impersonations. In a mild manner, Beba chides Pantaleón, "No se haga el chivo loco" (p. 15); as the father, she spurs Lalo, "No te quedes ahí como un pazjuato" (p. 36). Displaying a generally more acerbic attitude, Cuca addresses Beba as the mother, "¡Buena perla he mas salido tú!" (p. 58); and later

pronounces against Lalo: "No mereces el pan que te damos . . ." (p. 97). Lalo, in turn, criticizes the mother when he impersonates his father: "Ella trata de ponerlo todo negro. Sólo ve la paja en el ojo ajeno" (p. 101).

As has been noted, the harsher manifestations of colloquial expressions from part of a vituperative proclivity in the play. Lalo leads to this at the start when he invokes, "Oh, Afrodita, enciende esta noche de vituperios" (p. 12). The irony here lies in having the goddess of love instigate verbal discord; this underscores the family situation where members connect not through bonds of affection but through long strings of arguments. Insults do not always show any particular colloquial coloring, though they present the most vulgar level of diction. Cuca's harsh evaluation of Lalo is representative: "Me dan ganas de escupirlo. . . . Eres un monstruo" (p. 12). Lalo continues the tendency, assessing Cuca, "es imbécil. . . . Es una idiota . . ." (p. 28). Even Beba explodes, after having been subjected to an especially truculent phase of the drama ritual, "Ustedes son unos monstruos. Los dos son iguales" (p. 43). It is notable that opposite parties should be classified as equals; despite differences in attitudes, their modes of expression—in this case, verbal attacks—bond the siblings.

Throughout the impersonations, the characters further resort to insults. The most salient accumulation of these occurs in the trial scene when the mother harangues the son and the husband. "Miserable," she says to Lalo, "no sé cómo pude tenerte tanto tiempo en mis entrañas.

No sé cómo no te ahogué cuando naciste" (p. 87). She later comments about her husband, "en realidad es una basura. . . . Una porquería. No sirve para nada. Siempre ha sido un Don Nadie. Ha siempre vivido del cuento y pretende seguir haciéndolo. A veces he deseado que se muera" (p. 101). The husband accepts these insults but only as an oblique criticism of his wife's ways: "He sido un imbécil, un come-mierda," he admits, for having put up with her (p. 102). His more direct criticism of her, rather than falling into insults, tends towards detailed descriptions of execrable behavior. Due to this, the mother emerges as the most acidic member of the family, as she unravels her barbed speech.

Colloquialism and insults serve important functions, giving a communal coloring to the characters and signaling their resentment and exasperation. Other types of special speech emerge in the drama game as parents, neighbors, and members of various occupations are portrayed. Verbal mannerisms that include conversational formulas and professional jargon contribute to the presentation of stereotypes, individuals who represent members of a society held up for scrutiny.

Special language helps etch out the relationship between the household and the outside world. This is true in the visit and gossip sequences. When Pantaleón and Margarita enter into the drama game, their encounter with the family takes place through conversational formulas that parody "polite" speech. In a coarsely humorous manner, the conversation entails pseudo-communication that tends to denigrate the speakers. Thus, the characters take part in a physiological inquest with the working



of organs as the topic of discussion. "¿Funciona bien su vejiga?" asks Cuca, followed by Beba's "¿Todavía no se ha operado el esfinter?" (p. 14). This, of course, ties in with the series of interrogations, further serving to diminish linguistic constructions meant for elucidation and providing a satiric comment on social practices.

Along with vacuous questions, complaints come up in conversations as characterizing elements. In the first visit sequence, after Beba's facetious compliment, "la verruga se le ha puesto de lo más hermosa," Pantaleón pours forth a series of complaints: "Los años, mi hijita, lo van a uno deteriorando y acaban por hacerlo un trapo. . . . Hoy tengo un dolorcito aquí. . . . Es como una punzadita. . . . Estoy viejo, hecho un carcamal. . . . Y esto cada día va peor. Los hijos no respetan ni perdonan" (pp. 15-16).

In our examination of assertions, we saw how the characters evaluated surrounding reality and voiced resentments; complaints in parodic conversations parallel this at a superficial level, but here the banal substitutes for the profound, the jejune for the meaningful. In relation to conversational formulas, it becomes necessary and therefore automatic and worthless to protest against certain things—bodily functions, aging, and the children. The last topic seems exhausted by Cuca as the mother in the second visit sequence: ". . . esos vejigos me traen al trote. . . . Hay que espiarlos, vigilarlos, estar siempre en acecho, porque con capaces de las mayores porquerías" (p. 46).

In so far as visitors are presented mostly as intruders and contact with the outside world entails empty verbal formulas, the

relationship between the family and society adds another negative dimension to the siblings' life. Their situation is exacerbated by the concurrence of outsiders with the parents. The gossip sequences underscore this. While Lalo pointedly sharpens the knives, representative members of the community give versions of the situation inside the household, commenting on the nature of the children and on their crime. "Qué clase de hijos vienen al mundo" epitomizes the neighbors' general attitude (p. 32). "Y unos padres tan buenos, tan abnegados" completes the comment, putting society-at-large on the side of the parents, who emerge as idealized, just as the children are stereotyped as the bad seed.

Society only shows interest in the gory details of the murder, leaving no room for conscientious consideration of catalytic factors in the family situation. Margarita and Pantaleón spread the news with morbid gusto: "Qué espectáculo, niña. . . . Qué manera de haber sangre. Era espantoso. . . . Creo que había unas jeringuillas. . . . Y pastillas y ámpulas. . . . Ah, si vieras el cuchillo. Qué cuchillo. . . . Un matavaca, ángel del cielo" (p. 33). The intense words and the sentence structure also represent two other expressive tendencies that will be examined later. The neighbors' sensationalistic fascination and their total identification with the parents are important here; as Pantaleón grandiloquently declares, "Protestamos contra ese hijo desnaturalizado" (p. 35).

Immediately following the gossip section, a vendor's hawking of newspapers further characterizes the attitude of society towards

events within the family, drawing a relationship between public and private worlds. "Avance. Ultima noticia," he announces: "El asesinato de la calle Apodaca. . . . Un hijo de treinta años mata a sus padres. . . . Les metió a los viejos cuarenta puñaladas. . . . Vea las fotos de los padres inocentes. . . . Es espantoso, caballero" (p. 35). The sensationalistic appeal of the news presents still another criticism of society's institutions. A medium of communication which should provide sound information remains here at the service of the public's lowest interests. Moreover, the perspective of the outside world unequivocally persists on the side of the parents.

As with the neighbors and the newsboy, whose characterizing speech indicates coincidence against the siblings, the presentation of the policemen and the prosecuting attorney, representative of other aspects of society, also relies on verbal habits that reveal a network of oppression. We have seen how commands, interrogations, and assertions figure in this; adding stereotypical expressions and jargon to the list of shaping elements, we realize how all speech mannerisms come to characterize the criminal justice establishment as one more denigrating mechanism in society. Lines by the investigating officers, for instance, show an aggressive self-righteousness. "Gente puerca, ¿verdad?" one says; "Gente sin corazón" (p. 63). Insistently, they push towards the suspect's confession: "¿te decides hablar . . . o . . . ? . . . Habla que te conviene . . ." (pp. 68-69). This culminates in, "Has firmado tu sentencia, mi hermano" (p. 78). The attitude reflected in the language helps seal the fate of the accused.

In the sequence where the crime report is being typed, the language further depicts the negative qualities of law enforcement. Here, an objective report on the crime leads to an unqualified accusation (pp. 73-74). Lalo describes the report as a "mamotreto de mierda" and, though he admits guilt, insists on stating his case. The travesty of justice reaches its culmination in the trial scene. The prosecutor's speeches emerge as a paradigm of empty rhetoric, an unmitigated outpouring of histrionic courtroom phrases that ironically separates the listeners from the realities of the case under examination.

The process of justice as represented by the prosecuting attorney merits a closer look. His presentation of the case begins with an attempt to define justice, moves through an indictment against the defendant's behavior and climaxes in a call for official vengeance. The specific linguistic constructions employed throughout include assertions, commands, questions, and a tendency towards exaggeration we will examine in detail later. All this is nicely exemplified in: "He aquí, señoras y señores, al más repugnante asesino de la historia. Vedlo. No siente repulsión cualquier criatura frente a este detritus, frente a esta rata nauseabunda, frente a este escupitajo deleznable?" (pp. 79-80). In the definition of justice, sophistic questions abound (p. 77); in the description of the criminal and his act, denigrating assertions and leading questions serve to prejudice the listeners (pp. 78-80); towards the end of his long introductory speech the lawyer proclaims sanctimoniously: "nuestra ciudad se levanta, una ciudad de hombres silenciosos y arrogantes avanza decidida a reclamar a la justicia el cuerpo de este ser

monstruoso. . . . Y será expuesto a la furia de hombres verdaderos que quieren la paz y el sosiego" (p. 81). Beyond drawing an individual, the inflated language presents a devastating parody of courtroom jargon, serving to indict the whole legal process.

As we have seen, then, the presence of special speech in La noche . . ., from colorful colloquialisms to torrential jargon, helps depict manners, human types, and institutions. Hence, the play can be related to dramatic works in a criollo vein. Because of representative elements, Ramón de la Campa, who is mostly interested in Triana's reflection of Cuban reality, considers La noche . . . the culmination of the playwright's socially committed dramaturgy.<sup>5</sup> The treatment of typical social phenomena, however, remains essentially ironic. Verbal mannerisms that link characters to the common people and that help present aspects of their surrounding reality give the play a regionalist flavor with a strongly bitter aftertaste. Nevertheless, no matter how much a part of teatro criollo the work might seem, care should be taken not to interpret the incidence of special speech and national situations too narrowly. To situate the play unequivocally with any one period of Cuban history would erringly limit its relevance. Although characterizing language does give a more concrete identity to the dramatic world of La noche . . ., these verbal units are only a part of a whole structural network which, in its totality, presents universally applicable statements about the individual and society.

### Intensifying Expressions

The most significant structural elements so far examined entail basic grammatical constructions or special forms of diction. In both general cases, speech mannerisms remain linked to the commonplace, however emphatically they might emerge to highlight social and psychological phenomena. Other forms of expression in La noche . . ., however, arise out of a poetic tendency and offer an intensified reflection of reality. These can be divided into two main groups that respectively involve hyperbole and accumulation of words. Both are related in so far as exaggeration and compressed descriptions lead to an intensely negative effect. Yet hyperbolic statements emerge through diction, whereas accumulation is tied to sentence structure. Often, these expressive tendencies manifest themselves in similar if not the same dramatic contexts, fulfilling associated structural purposes. In our examination, then, we may deal with these shaping elements together, looking at location, features and function within the play's verbal fabric.

Considered closely, hyperbole appears in La noche . . . in relation to two principal, interlocking themes: the murder of the parents and the oppressive household situation. These are forcefully developed throughout the drama by means of intense and frequently exaggerated words and phrases. When first we hear of the parents' death, the language already shows hyperbolic tendencies. Lalo says, "Hemos llenado la sala de gladiolos. Las flores que más le gustaban a mamá. No se pueden quejar. Después de muertos los hemos complacido. Yo mismo he vestido esos cuerpos rígidos, viscosos . . . y he cavado con estas

manos un hueco bien profundo. Tierra, venga tierra" (pp. 3-4). The great quantity of flowers, the terrible state of the corpses, the depth of the hand-made excavation, the amount of earth required for burial, all create an overpowering sensation of death. Dramatic emphasis is gained through macabre adjectives and qualifiers of quantity. These terms which heighten the description of the funeral and the burial also show the speaker's fascination with the reported events, giving them an important position on the psychological plane of the play.

As the action progresses, references to the murder continue to form a unifying strand, developed mostly through highly charged speech. In the first act, for instance, we get Beba's perspective on the funeral: "Veo esos cadáveres y me parece mentira. Es un espectáculo digno de verse. Se me ponen los pelos de punta. . . . Vuelan, se disgregan" (p. 8). The passage contains a touch of the surrealistic, along with some of the dark wit that occasionally colors the play. The idea of the funeral as a show again surfaces when Beba impersonates Margarita: "Qué espectáculo, niña. (Horrorizada.). Qué manera de haber sangre. Era espantoso. Mira como se me ponen los pelos. Me erizo de pies a cabeza . . ." (p. 33). As she goes on, the details of the description remain extreme: "Y después un reguero, mira es increíble. . . . Ah, si vieras el cuchillo. Qué cuchillo. . . . Un matavaca, ángel del cielo" (p. 33). This sequence culminates in Pantaleón's comments, "Ah, si llegas a ver el charco de sangre . . . y el olor. . . . No quieras haber visto aquello. . . . Era horrible. . . . Horrible, si. . . . Horrible es la palabra" (p. 34).

Immediately after the gossip scene, Cuca impersonates a newsboy whose presentation of the crime further displays a tendency towards extreme words: "¡Mira cómo corrió la sangre! . . . Les metió a los padres cuarenta puñaladas. . . . Es espantoso, caballero. . . . Tremendo tasajeo . . ." (p. 35). Thus, the theme of the murder is expressed through a variety of characters who share magnified views of reality. Their intensified versions of events seem to protrude from the surrounding verbal texture as a sort of dramatic bas-relief. This, of course, serves to emphasize the theme involved but also contributes to heightening through occasional horror—however, not without ironic touches on the classical dramatic effect. Though the language may indeed be intense and hyperbolic, the type of speaker and his attitude must also be considered. Lalo and Beba, as themselves, do sometimes use a sort of poetic diction that seriously presents the terrible magnitude of the crime. Yet, in the mouths of the gossips and the newsboy, the event takes on a vulgar quality; their words, drawn from the vernacular, are inspired by base interests or commercialism. A particular expressive element, then, emphasizes the difference between private and public perspectives on an event. This helps etch out the relationship among individuals, family, and society. The mostly solemn, purgative nature of the murder inside the house takes on a sensationalistic, exploitable dimension outside. Publicity—whether word of mouth or officially disseminated—joins other phenomena as part of a denigrating social mechanism, transmogrifying the family situation and its awful consequences. The use of the same structural element with



variations, at once, unifying and differential, gives us a concrete example of what theorists of dramatic form identify as an essential shaping device. This is further witnessed in the second act.

When the investigating officers arrive on the scene, their hyperbolic statements continue to develop public perspective on the murder. As Cuca, impersonating a policeman, reports, "¡Si vieras! es un espectáculo bochornoso, qué digo, horrible. Se le paran los pelos al gallo más pintado. . . . Abrió un hueco enorme. No sé cómo pudo hacerlo solo . . ." (p. 70). Beba, in a companion role, reaffirms, "Es espantoso" (p. 70). Intense adjectives that record the crime and exaggerated phrases that reveal strong reactions are reiterated, identifying the perspective of the police to that of the neighbors and the newspaper. Soon, the representative of the legal system joins the group, completing the social groups castigated in the play. His tendency to exaggerate, blurring a precise understanding of the case, shows in statements like "He aquí el más repugnante asesino de la historia" (p. 79). Here, the similarity to carnival barking contains a criticism of the courts.

In the second portion of the play, as retrospective exposition takes up most of the act, hyperbole appears mostly in conjunction with the depiction of the family situation. As Beba summarily describes the household, "Esta casa es un laberinto" (p. 68). More specifically, characters often use extreme words and phrases in voicing their complaints. Lalo, for instance, tells of "horas interminables es un cuarto oscuro," where the parents "repetían una y mil veces que debía morir"

(p. 87). The mother, in turn, reprimands her son, "Has contado tu martirologio, cuenta el nuestro . . ." (p. 96); she goes on to state her case, frequently relying on exaggerated language to describe her suffering and deterioration: "Señor juez, si Vd. supiera las lágrimas que he derramado. . . . Todo lo he perdido. . . . (A Lalo.) No sé cómo no te ahogué cuando naciste" (pp. 96-97). Then the father continues the strain: "Yo creía que me volvía loco y deba vueltas en un mismo círculo siempre . . . me ahogaba" (p. 106). The unbearableness of the situation is communicated through denotations of great quantities or duration and through magnifying metaphors. These accent the recurrent theme, revealing exacerbated characters driven to extreme emotional outbursts.

It is notable that the most forceful language in La noche . . . appears in relation to despair and to a violent act. When forms of expression—assertions, commands, interrogations—reflect an effort to control or to move beyond the negative status quo through reasonable means, they emerge in comparatively tame terms. Hence, the hyperbolic tendency appears selectively, as if a magnifying glass were placed over certain aspects of the drama; this highlights the idea that extreme problems create radical reactions. Hence, we witness the characters' anguished verbal explosions and the reiterated, detailed account of the murder. On the psychological plane of the drama, indulging in exaggerated speech provides the siblings with an effective means to exorcise their demons. Through intense elocutions, the three characters confront the worst aspects of their lives and enact the most violent liberation, murder.

Similar to hyperbolic statements in effect but different in form, another structural element in the play serves to underscore the negative; this involves accumulation of details, appearing through repetition or cataloguing. While hyperbole depended on the exaggerated nature of words and phrases, the verbal tendency we must now consider entails a peculiar presentation of elements in a phrase. Listing of descriptive details and repetition of significant words creates an intensification similar to that of hyperbole. Moreover, all these forms of expression also arise in approximate dramatic contexts, showing a likeness in function.

Accumulation of details, as we will see, indeed often appears in the very same passages as exaggerated statements. If not in immediate proximity to hyperbole, then listing and repetition at least serve to emphasize the same themes as that figure of speech. Thus, the death of the parents and its catalyst, the family situation, are doubly underscored. Consider how this works in relation to the state of the household which, as has been shown, is presented symbolically through physical descriptions. For instance, at the beginning of the play, Cuca states, "Este cuarto es un asco. Cucarachas, ratones, polillas, ciempiés . . . el copón divino" (p. 4). The accumulation of nouns without connectives insistently communicates the idea of infestation by vermin, representing the deterioration of the family and revealing the speaker's disgust with the situation. Note how her lines culminate in a phrase that at once ties in with hyperbole and the vernacular. In a later attack against Lalo, she adds to the feeling of decay: "Cada día que

pasa te irás poniendo más viejo . . . y aquí, aquí, aquí, encerrado entre telarañas y polvo. Lo sé, lo veo, lo respiro" (p. 19). Here, the repetition of the adverb with an accented final syllable emphasizes the idea of stagnation. Moreover, the speaker's conviction emerges through the reiterated pronouns in the list of verbs. The rhythm of phrases like these, with a structure that stacks up elements, also contributes to an emotionally heightened effect.

Lalo shares the tendency to accumulate words, which emerges in several thematic variations related to the household situation. Showing his view of the parents, for example, he states: "Green que lo que yo pienso y quiero hacer es algo que está fuera de toda lógica. Quieren que todo permanezca inmóvil, que nada se mueva de su sitio . . . se imaginan que yo hago estas cosas por contradecirlos, por oponerme, por humillarlos . . ." (p. 20). Later, expressing a desire for self-determination, Lalo adds, "Yo quiero mi vida: estos días, estas horas, estos minutos. . . . Sin embargo, tengo las manos atadas. Tengo los pies atados. Tengo los ojos vendados. Y esta casa se pone vieja, sucia y huele mal" (p. 23). Any part of speech, any sort of phrase, when used to accumulate descriptive details and to display tumultuous feelings, joins particular dramatic moments to the whole structural series of intensifying elements. This shows ties among characters, relating different points of view. Even Beba, for instance, who plays an ancillary role, resorts to listing and repetition in an excited state; thus, she voices her desperation with the family situation: "Ay, gritos y más gritos. No puedo más. . . . Vueltas y más vueltas . . .

esos gritos de los mil demonios por cualquier bobería: por un vaso de agua, por un jabón que se cayó al suelo, por un toalla sucia, por un cenicero roto, porque va a faltar el agua, porque no hay tomates" (pp. 29-30). The passage gathers several common expressive elements: hyperbole in incremental phrases, vernacular diction, a negative construction admitting defeat, and, of course, listing and repetition. Typically, the latter present a sweeping view of reality, with the moving focus from one petty cause of conflict to another insistently creating an intensifying rhythm.

In the second act, Lalo continues the strain by voicing his complainst through catalogues. "Me gritaban, me golpeaban, me castigaban," he says, following up with some hyperbolic assertions about his punishments (p. 87). Again, the physical aspects of the house come to signify his desperately stagnant situation: "Aquellas paredes, aquellas alfombras, aquellas cortinas y las lámparas y el sillón donde papá dormía la siesta y la cama y los armarios y las sábanas . . . todo eso, lo odiaba, quería que desapareciera" (p. 88). In turn, Cuca as the mother details losses and bemoans great misery. She summarily states, "todo, lo he perdido: mi juventud, mi alegría, mis distracciones" (pp. 96-97). Her displays can be aggressive—attacks against Lalo—or defensive—rebuttals of her husband's accusations. She tells her son, "Te quieres pasar por bobo, pero conozco tus artimañas, tus rejuegos, tus porquerías. Por algo te parí. Nueve meses de mareos, vómitos, sobresaltos" (p. 95); later, she tries to refute her husband, "Señor juez, sus borracheras, sus amigos, sus invitados a deshora . . ." (p. 102). He counters this with his own catalogues:

Días antes de casarnos empezaron las contrariedades: que si la iglesia era de barrio y no de primera categoría, que si el traje de novia no tiene la cola muy larga, que tus hermanas decían, que tu madre, que tu prima, que tu tía, que tus amigas pensaban, que si tu abuela había dicho, que si los invitados debían ser tal y mascul, que si el cake no tiene diez pisos, que si tus amigos deben ir de etiqueta.  
 . . . (p. 103)

This accumulation of the wife's capricious desires communicates the speaker's exasperation, spurred by her pretensions, with the back and forth shift between present and imperfect tenses showing his atemporal resentment; the persistence of pain from old wounds as a sub-theme tied to the foul household situation further relates the play to El Mayor General . . .

Besides helping to present the family's internecine struggles, accumulation of details appears in conjunction with several aspects of the murder. For instance, listing joins hyperbole to add intensity to the description of the funeral: "Mira: los cirios, las flores. . . . Yo mismo he vestido esos cuerpos rígidos, viscosos . . ." (pp. 3-4). Moreover, the impulse towards homicide also gets described through listing: "Los armarios, la cama, las cortinas, los floreros, las alfombras, los ceniceros, las sillas lo empujan hacia los cuerpos desnudos, resoplando quien sabe que porquería" (p. 51). An echo of this emerges in the second act: "fui descubriendo que todo, las alfombras, la cama, los armarios, el espejo, los floreros, los vasos, las cucharas y mi sombra, en el murmullo, reclamaban: 'Mata a tus padres'" (p. 94). Such lines take objects in the house beyond their representation of family decay, endowing them with animistic power to dictate behavior and thus displacing Lalo's guilt.

The formulation of the defense further relies on accumulation when the accused lashes out against the justice system in a series of questions, repetitions, and parallel constructions. He rails: "¿Pien-san acaso que voy a firmar ese mamotreto de mierda? ¿Qué saben ustedes de todo eso? . . . Basura, basura, basura. Eso es lo digno. Eso es lo ejemplar. Eso es lo respetable" (p. 75). Interestingly, the district attorney resorts to like forms of expression in launching his attack; recall the hyperbolic questions regarding the magnitude of the crime, which precede "¿Puede la justicia cruzarse de brazos? . . . ¿podemos admitir que un sujeto de tal especie comparta nuestras ilusiones y nuestras esperanzas? . . . Vedlo, indiferente, imperturbable, ajeno a cualquier sentimiento de ternura, comprensión o piedad. Ved ese rostro" (p. 80). This is quickly followed by a string of purely rhetorical questions about motives and vacuous assertions about justice (pp. 79-80). These accumulations of typical verbal elements, then, come to present all facets of the crime and its repercussions, highlighting motivation and judgment. Listing and repetition thus help make the theme of the murder centripetal in the drama.

Although both hyperbolic statements and accumulation of details lend themselves to similar dramatic ends—heightening emotions, intensifying descriptions, and ultimately accentuating major themes—there remains an important difference between these two structural elements. An exaggeration, whether through metaphor or through a quantity signifier, creates a momentary effect, offering a sudden image that bubbles up and then dissolves into the verbal flow. Accumulation, on

the other hand, whether by means of listing or of repetition, depends on comparatively lengthier presentation. The latter structural arrangement greatly relies on rhythm—staccato with single words and more ponderously cadenced with longer phrases—for its impact. Hence, there is an absence of connectives or a reiteration of constructions, often with repeated words, in the passages with verbal accumulation. These out-of-the-ordinary word and phrase arrangements can result in condensed versions of reality, climatic revelation of feelings, and insistent exposition of ideas, all presented with striking emphasis.

Beyond effectual similarities and compositional differences, hyperbole and accumulation together constitute a contrast to the commonplace forms of expression in the play. Metaphoric and quantitative exaggeration, descriptive listing, and accentual repetition, all contribute to moments of exasperated poetry or obsessional rhetoric; on the other hand, insults, warnings, and aphorisms, put forth in colorful but ordinary language, introduce a typifying vernacular strain into the text. The juggling of these dramatic counterparts, quite often joined in the same passages, creates a deliberately employed stylistic tension. The heightening language extends the scope of the drama as situational and psychological intensification endows events and characters with symbolic dimensions, while the vernacular keeps them rooted in quotidian reality. This sort of contrast in speech also appears in other plays by Triana, especially in Media en el espejo, where it even more extensively and significantly shapes the presentation.<sup>6</sup> In La noche . . ., the use of stylistic contrast is salient



enough, however, to prompt a critic like Matías Montes Huidobro to write of the parents as hyperbolic symbols of "una autoridad maligna, cruel, implacable," while at the same time he comments on the banality of the domestic drama presented through the confrontation of husband and wife.<sup>7</sup>

### Hypnotic Elements

The structural elements examined thus far constitute the principal strands that characterize the verbal fabric of La noche de los asesinos. Entailing grammatical constructions and special diction, having specific functions and meanings, together the shaping units help present all the important aspects of the drama. There still remains, however, another sort of formative presence to be considered in the play; this may be described as a hypnotic mechanism. At one level, it produces a purely auditory effect; at another, it connects with the thematic network of the drama.

Let us first consider the hypnotic elements solely as sound effects. Although these stand out from the drama, we will see how closely they tie into scenes and, ultimately, into the central ideas of the play. In act one, during an important moment, we hear the sharpening of knives. While Beba and Cuca impersonate various characters, Lalo keeps emitting a ric-rac noise. The sisters present the public view of the crime, while he counterpoints their dialog. His sounds intensify the scene, as the very stage directions indicate: "frotando con cierta firmeza los dos cuchillos" soon becomes "frotando violentemente . . ." (p. 32). The effect is then described summarily: "Lalo ha seguido

frotando los cuchillos. Este acto, aparentemente simple, debe ir creando, acompañado por los sonidos emitidos por el propio Lalo, un clímax delirante" (p. 35). While the speakers offer works of repulsion marked with lowly fascination, Lalo adds an insistent auditory background that helps sweep the listeners along on the dizzying wave of societal disapproval.

Beyond the direct effect of the sounds, there are multiple implications in the knife sharpening. First of all, Lalo's noise and motions illustrate the topic of the outsiders' wagging. He figures as the sinister agent of violence they delight in describing. At the same time, he seems to represent the aggressiveness that society itself shows in recriminating the accused, as the sharpening of words prepares for the administration of punishment. Ultimately, the menacing sound that Lalo makes appears to turn against the speakers. As their comments become an oppressive barrage, an extreme reaction seems more justifiable within that exasperating social context of which the parents were also part; thus, Lalo's violent impulse, portrayed through the ric-rac sound, remains open to interpretation, as it bears the ambivalence of being characterized both as malevolent and liberating. The auditory effects, then, reach past their intensifying hypnotic quality and tie in with the structural network that presents the individual and his surroundings in the play.

In the second act, the typing of the police report parallels the sharpening of the knives. As the stage directions state: "La escena, a partir de este momento, debe adquirir una dimensión extraña.

Los elementos que se emplean en ella son: Los sonidos vocales, los golpes sobre la mesa y el taconeo acompasado, primero de Beba y luego de los dos personajes (Beba y Cuca), en el escenario. Debe aprovecharse hasta el máximo" (p. 72). Once again, the sounds add an intensifying dimension. As tension increases, the insistent tac-tac-tac entrances the listener. The content of the report is accented by the pounding of the keys, which makes the words more oppressive.

Whereas at a purely auditory level the knife sharpening and the typing have like effects, the latter hypnotic element implies other ideas. Literally and figuratively, the mechanism of justice is shown at work, as the policeman puts the official version of the crime on paper. He pushes stubbornly towards the criminal's confession, without a silent pause that might allow for a divergent interjection. The irritating quality of the tac-tac-tac further illustrates how the legal process itself can be part of the punishment; this concept first arises in the policeman's earlier questioning and is developed through the excruciating palaver of the prosecutor in the trial scene. An impression remains that the statements in the police report are interchangeable with the typing noise, meaninglessly marking time towards unavoidable punitive action.

Although the sharpening of the knives and the typing of the police report tie in with overall themes in the play, they primarily serve to structure specific scenes. A third hypnotic element, however, figures in more than one dramatic context; this is the song of household metamorphosis that Lalo creates, "La sala no es la sala. . . ."

References to it appear throughout the dialog and important moments in both acts gain emphasis through its emergence.

Towards the end of the first act, as Cuca's maternal recriminations augment tension in an argument with Lalo, the playacting takes a decisive turn. Desperate at that moment, Lalo moves to commit murder. In a highly stylized scene, Cuca announces the song, and both sisters take up set positions on stage, suggesting the predetermined, significant actions common to ritual. When Lalo reenters and starts to describe the crime, the stage directions indicate: "Las dos hermanas comienzan a cantar en un murmullo apagado: 'La sala no es la sala. La sala es la cocina. El cuarto no es el cuarto. El cuarto es el inodoro'" (p. 50).

The low murmur of the sisters' singing adds a special dimension to Lalo's speech. Besides underscoring his words, endowing them with more emotional power, the song perpetuates the ritualistic atmosphere, accompanying the description of the murder with choral solemnity. Thus, the listener becomes readily entranced. The more intense involvement with the speech made possible by the song allows for the proper perspective on the patricide; feeling the cathartic resonance of the act, the audience is moved beyond repugnancy at the violence.

Besides enhancing the ritualistic atmosphere of the scene, the emergence of the song in conjunction with the murder speech communicates important ideas that are interwoven throughout the play. As the lyrics describe a transformation in the rooms of the house, first denying their identity and then giving them a new name, Lalo presents details of an act

that will putatively initiate a liberating change for the survivors in the family. Thus, the relationship between song and speech reenforces at once the symbolic import of the assertions—a verbal substitute for the extreme act of violence—and the significance of the murder—the ultimate expression of the need for change patent in the lyrics.

The appearance of the song towards the end of act one also serves a less substantial but nevertheless considerable function. In addition to its atmospheric and thematic purposes, the sister's singing helps bring the first part of the play to a fitting conclusion, working as a punctuating element. Emerging in the dramatic passage, the song helps create the right climactic intensity; when the sisters stop singing, the ensuing calm and quiet highlights the concluding moment of dissipated energies. Finally, the song's qualities as a coup de théâtre make it a striking theatrical element that produces a lingering effect—at first, emotional and, then, conducive to intellectual considerations. Thus, the song of metamorphosis, as an appropriate concluding element, helps bind together preceding material yet keeps it viable for further development.

Throughout the second act, information about the song is relayed as Lalo and his mother expose the family situation. Even in act one, Beba mentions how the song served for her as a form of escape from an oppressive reality; surrounded by conflicts she felt impotent to resolve, the girl opted for repetition of Lalo's lyrics, evoking verbal transformation in lieu of concrete change (p. 30). Lalo's reference to the song during the trial scene develops this, especially

when he relates the genesis of his composition. We are told about an urgent need for change that pushed Lalo towards drastic action, specifically the murder of the parents. His resistance to violence gave birth to the song. For him, then, singing the words to "La sala no es la sala" allowed for reconstruction of reality that avoided actual destruction (p. 92). Whereas in Lalo's case the song represented a mechanism of transcendence, the mother viewed it mostly as a form of aggression. She saw it, along with Lalo's moving around of objects in the household, as a threat to order (p. 96). So, the cleverness of the lyrics lay in their ability to assuage Lalo's frustration while they wore away at the status quo. The perspectives given in the nature of the song add dimension to its appearance as a hypnotic element, clarifying what the lyrics mean to the singers.

Close to the end of act two, Beba again takes up the song of metamorphosis in a scene that parallels the conclusion of the play's first part. As the stage directions indicate, she must establish through her singing "una fuerte interrelación entre los cantos y las palabras de Lalo y Cuca. Los cantos de Beba aparecen primeramente como gruñidos y se van transformando hasta alcanzar un acento dulce, sencillez, ingenuo casi" (p. 106). This comes at a climax in the argument between the parents, substantiating the song's relationship to the desperate family situation. On a purely auditory level, what begins as a sort of primitive protest—hoarse groans—turns into a palliative mechanism—child-like, chanted incantations. Hence, a significant tension is at first built up by the background of sound but soon gives

way to an attenuating oral accompaniment to the father's bitter, disillusioned words. It could be said that the lyrics of the song become wistfully touching in their simple attempt to deal with a harsh reality. Properly, the song ends when Lalo as the defeated father states, "Había que limpiar la casa" (p. 108). Although this phrase is tied to the series of assertions about fixing the household, the use of the imperfect here, along with the sudden silence, indicates that the time for limited measures—minor improvements or coping mechanisms—has passed. A momentary quiet then serves to emphasize one final explosion of ill feelings. At this point, Beba suddenly takes up the song again, impersonating Lalo with a violent version of the lyrics that becomes an anthem of destruction. Thus, as the play moves towards and through climax and conclusion, the presence of the song endows the scene with nuances, both thematic and emotive, fulfilling this structural element's role. It should be further noted that, beyond its intensifying effect and reenforcement of characterizing ideas, the singing greatly enhances symmetry in the play, helping to punctuate the concluding scene in both acts. In effect, what superficially appears as a mere hypnotic element that deeply engages the audience turns out to be a prime example of a significant, multifarious shaping element.

#### Dialog Patterns

In La noche de los asesinos, there are important shaping elements beyond minute verbal units. Although the form of the play greatly depends on the recurrent use of special words and constructions, all of

these acquire cohesiveness within dramatic sequences through another type of expressive element, the dialog pattern. The latter embraces more than just one sort of diction or of grammatical structure, as it involves the dynamics of verbal interchange. The dialog pattern determines the grouping and direction of lines, thus contributing to the presentation of every major aspect of the play. We must examine, then, how these more comprehensive structural elements operate in Triana's work.

In talking about the dialog patterns of a dramatic text, let us identify the principal forces that generate, interweave, and move locutions. In El Mayor General . . ., two central and related expressive tendencies, a dialectic and an anti-dialectic, variously manifested, bonded and propelled speech sequences. Similarly, the full-length play contains much movement through confrontation. Opposing points of view battle towards resolution in submission or they keep perpetuating a particular stance through persistent declarations. Two specific manifestations of these tendencies are related to the levels of reality in the play. Emerging on the plane of actuality, there is the question of whether or not to participate in the drama game, presented through opposing characters. Related to this, the conflict between rebellion and conformity also arises. These dialectics frequently determine the thrust and nature of interchange among the siblings. Many more dramatic passages, however, occur at the imaginary level, and though they also contain development through conflict, the fundamental shaping principle differs. In the playacting, parody dominates the dialog. Here the



siblings present the worst aspects of their world, mimicking characters and situations in an intensifying fashion. Besides reenactment of social and familial oppression, the parodies usually contain an element of revenge. Thus, they not only serve to release resentment but also provide a psychological weapon against denigrating realities. Let us look, then, at how these general expressive tendencies embrace particular dramatic sequences.

The central concern over participation in the drama game is most extensively developed in the initial scenes of each act. Characters here take up sides, moving towards or resisting commencement of the playacting ritual. In the first act, Lalo has the dominant role—as a sort of director—urging the initiation of the game, and Cuca is his antagonist; in the second act, brother and sister exchange roles, with the latter now demanding continuation. Beba plays an ancillary part in both confrontations, first aiding Lalo, and then reluctantly complying with Cuca. Although a dialectic does generate the dialog in these sections, little reasoning takes place. Persuasive argument easily gives way to cohesion and intimidation by the director, eliciting stubborn resistance by the antagonist. Thus, the opening dialogs in both acts gather aggressive commands, on the one hand, and defensive assertions, on the other. The tension between opposing parties finds resolution not in an understanding but in submission of the antagonistic presence. Hence, the drive towards playacting triumphs.

Besides governing the dialectic at the beginning of each act, the conflict between striving to play and declining further emerges in the midst of imaginative segments. At certain key moments, one of the

siblings will suddenly step out of a characterization and refuse to continue in the game. This occurs when the playacting has become especially fierce. In the first act, Beba exclaims, weakened by a scolding: "(Saliendo de situación.) No puedo. La cabeza me va a estallar" (p. 40). Then, tormented by oppressive parental attention, she adds, "Déjame ya . . ." (p. 43). Other departures from characterizations occur in the second act whenever an opponent's speech turns so strident as to seem an unfair departure from correct dramatic procedure. For instance, Lalo complains about Cuca's courtroom accusations: "Estás haciendo trampas. Te veo venir. Quieres hundirme, pero no podrás" (p. 78). Conversely, when Lalo's defense gains momentum, Cuca recoils: "(Violenta.) Me voy. Estás jugando sucio" (p. 94). Objections of this sort are either swept away in the emotional flow of dialog or countered effectively by the other determined players. Cuca meets her sister's reluctance to go with him, "Tú, precisamente tú . . . que siempre me has estado empujando: 'Hazlo, no seas boba. Nos divertiremos.' Es increíble. Lo estoy viendo y me parece mentira. Vamos, levántate. (La ayuda a levantarse. Como la madre.) Recuerda que estás delante de una visita" (pp. 43-44). These lines cleverly go from argument to involvement in the playacting. Although Beba keeps resisting, her words are turned into part of the drama game. Later, when Cuca herself complains about Lalo's speech and starts to leave, he commands, "Hay que llegar hasta el final. . . . Tú también has tratado de aprovecharte" (p. 94). As a momentary argument between brother and sister ensues, it is up to Beba playing the judge to reestablish courtroom—and ritual—procedure: "¡Orden! ¡Silencio! Pido a los señores de la sala que

guarden la debida compostura . . ." (p. 94). The characters are thus drawn into the imaginative segment and Cuca must express her animosity within the boundaries of the drama game, countering Lalo through an impersonation of the mother.

The occasional emergence of the "to play or not to play" conflict within game sequences has important implications. Primarily, it shows how tensions, resolved by force, can spring up again during trying moments, having been subjacent all along. We will see later how these personal differences among the siblings influence the drama game. Indeed, the two levels of reality in the play stay in close contact, and their relationship gains a clearer definition in the resurgence of actual conflicts within imaginative segments. Antagonisms that feed arguments over participation in the ritual often manifest themselves in the impersonations, ultimately surfacing unmasked in refusals to go on playing. The points of convergence between levels of reality make for dramatic coherence; moreover, they indicate a basic characteristic of the playacting. While imaginative segments do show a set pattern, dictated by the psychological needs that shape the ritualistic "script," there remains room for improvisation in the drama game. This is evident in the behavior that stirs players to resist the direction of a particular scene. An actor protests or tries to stop playing when the tone, the topic, even the type of role taken up by an antagonist diverts towards the unexpected, usually with stinging consequences. These instances of personal interpretation and opportunistic adaptation of dramatic procedure show that to a practical extent—serving the needs of the players—the ritualistic game is open to impromptu behavior.

Given the bond between the actual and the imaginative levels of reality in the play, swift movement from fantasy to actuality and back again, seems perfectly natural. Such is the case with the interjection of the polemic segment between enacted scenes. Here Cuca and Lalo begin by arguing about his behavior towards the guests during the first imaginary visit (p. 18ff). Soon, they move into a discussion of their actual situation, expressing attitudes and releasing emotions. The conflict between playing and not playing and between continuing in one or in another direction now transforms itself into a dispute over taking action or remaining passive in view of the familial situation. Lalo, the urgen director, calls for change through a rebellious act; Cuca, the voice of resistance, advocates conformity. Their opposition goes through phases, punctuated by Beba's chorus-like interpolations as the father. Declaration of oppressive conditions in the household, coupled with Lalo's subversive statements, are at first countered with discouragement from Cuca. As the interchange concentrates more on the roots of their pbolems—mostly parent-children relationships—Beba suddenly surfaces portraying imperious parental authority (p. 23). She adds adds substance to Lalo's point of view, which fits her role, ancillary to the director.

While Lalo's perspective comes to predominate in the polemic segment, Cuca's conformist remarks are brushed aside, losing dialectic effectiveness. This gives way to an ultimate statement of rebellion not only against the parents but against the whole oppressive system (p. 25). Again, Beba interjects a quick impersonation of the father,

underscoring the unbearable status quo and delineating a discursive boundary. The concluding phase ensues as Cuca proposes and Lalo rejects a commonplace measure like running away from the unbearable home (p. 26). This only leaves room for discussion of extraordinary action—continuation of the cathartic ritual or even murder. The boundaries between levels of reality become further blurred as Cuca's summary defense of the parents is received by the others as a piece of acting, which diminishes her resistance to rebellious behavior. Finally, the clash of attitudes turns physical, with Lalo's overpowering of Cuca. Hence, although the polemic segment begins with the promise of meaningful exchange, it deteriorates into obstinate antagonism and ultimate submission. The concluding altercation prompts Beba to voice her despair by pouring forth a catalogue of internecine conflicts. She expresses exactly what we have witnessed; dehumanizing modes of interchange pass from one generation to the next, as the children "siguen discutiendo, como si esta casa se pudiera arreglar con palabras, y terminan fajándose también" (pp. 30-31). In contrast with his obdurate behavior towards Cuca, Lalo uses gentle persuasion to diminish Beba's disgust and move her towards compliance with the drama game. Of course, this fits Beba's conspiratorial relationship with her brother in the first act.

The initiation sections of the play along with the polemic segment share a dialog pattern wherein lines move through a basic conflict to be arrested, not resolved, in the forceful submission of the anti-game, anti-rebellion presence. As would be expected, assertions,

negations, and commands predominate within this type of interchange. Just as reiterated words and constructions have special significance in the structuring of the play, the repeated emergence of a general dialog pattern bears formative meaning. The atmosphere of conflict created by a strident dialectic helps define characters, establish their situation, and communicate themes. The personalities of the three siblings taking up roles as director, antagonist, and aide are delineated through their verbal interchange. Moreover, not only do the discussions allow for the exposition of character but also provide a clearer view of the household situation, revealing background and serving themselves as examples of deteriorated conditions in the family. The tense, coercive form of communication that passes for a dialectic also points to a central theme in the play. Given the transmission of behavioral evils from the oppressors to the oppressed, putative remedies—ritual or violence—for social problems incorporate perverse fundamental attitudes.

Although segments outside the playacting establish basic conflicts and reveal characters, the purely formal function remains to be considered, that of providing a frame for the imaginative sequences. Developing from the initiation sections, influenced by the familial polemic, the dialog patterns within the drama game emerge as an extension of conflicts from the plane of actual reality. With this quality, the playacting runs through a variety of scenes, all of which tend to show the same general dynamic. In effect, segments of the drama game arise as parody, drawing their shape from exaggerated mimicking of social and familial phenomena. Hence, the worst aspects of circumstances

are held up for criticism and representative characters emerge as grotesque caricatures. As such, the ritual playacting already serves as an effective means of indictment. Beyond parody, however, the drama game employs an even more incisive relief mechanism, an element of enacted revenge and vindication. While different scenes share the characteristics of parody, they also tend to culminate in some sort of triumph over an oppressor. This is achieved by the introduction of a passage that entails a direct offense—the belittling of an antagonist—or a powerful defense—the lengthy and intense presentation of the underdog's point of view. The need for such an element in the playacting seems obvious, given the restrictions of real life. The precise manifestations of the dialog pattern in imaginative segments will be revealed when we examine specific scenes.

The mechanisms involved in the playacting start working when Margarita and Pantaleón first come on in act one (p. 13). Here, the parody takes off from imitation of a typical visit by family acquaintances, with all its attendant chatter. The dialog shapes up as an asenine interrogation, and the speakers appear risibly bizarre. Their conversation concentrates on physiological problems and contains many typifying colloquialisms, funny and banal, which ridicule social behavior. Thus, the relationship of the household to the outside world begins to be defined. Family and friends join to take part in a meaningless practice, exhibiting absurd manners; thus, they become conspirators in perpetuating irritatingly foolish activity. The negative picture remains open for later criticism.

The revenge element in the first visit segment is introduced through Lalo's reaction to the guests. A great deal of tension emerges in the pairing of the sisters' amiability with their brother's unsociability; this is another manifestation of the conflict between conformity and rebelliousness. The outburst against the visitors with which Lalo forces the scene to close insures the dominance of his point of view. He lets out his rage by insulting the visitors and chasing them from the house with an imaginary whip—an act symbolic of righteousness. In this way, Lalo purges his emotions through histrionic behavior implausible in actuality.

The pattern set in the first imaginative segment goes through appropriate variations in future scenes yet remains significantly similar. The gossip sequence that puts the siblings back in the play-acting after their familial polemic shows a new manifestation of the basic dialog pattern. The ear-catching, "¿Sabes una cosa, Cacha?" (p. 31), initiates the segment. After curiosity is stirred, there follows an elaboration of events surrounding the murder of the parents. Even though no continuous interrogation occupies the segment—like the insistent health questions before and the inquisitions to follow—the dialog does involve the steady divulging of information by the meddling neighbors for the curious listener. The public, then, becomes Cacha, and conspires in the sensationalizing of the family tragedy. This sort of exploitation represents still another debasement of communication. The paper vendor's hawking further exemplifies the cheapening of serious events. The latter stretch of dialog reveals the



opportunism involved in the commercialization of human misfortune. Both sections of the public information segment extend the theme of societal deterioration reflected in meretricious verbal contact.

Still on the imaginative level, a juxtaposition takes place: intimate family scenes follow the public view of the household. These seem to counteract the attitudes of the external world, which not only used the family tragedy to satisfy base desires but also showed no understanding of the children. Hence, the perspective we get on familial interaction substantiates the siblings' complaints as it belies the criticism of outsiders. As such, the segment has a function similar to the previous revenge element, providing for personal satisfaction, now through vindication. This is achieved by presenting a series of encounters among parents and children with a rapid rhythm and a shifting focus, thus creating a documentary effect. The authoritarian voice of the parents remains dominant throughout the segment. Although the children are assailed with questions, the constant prodding accusations, and commands leave little room for reply. Consistent with the verbal patterns that have been established and anticipating dialogs to follow, these interrogations turn into castigation. Once more, language is used towards demeaning ends. In fact, the stridency of the playacting reaches a point that forces Beba to abandon her characterization, creating a momentary lull in the ritual. Lalo quickly commands her to continue, however, and she is swept along by the introduction of a new sequence: "Ahora sonaba el timbre de la puerta" (p. 40). This line illustrates the guiding presence of a mental script.

The second visit segment, besides reasserting the fantasy, provides a new, clever juxtaposition that completes the presentation of public and private views of the family situation. In front of the visitors, aggressive interrogation first becomes solicitous inquiry of the children, showing how the parents whitewash the familial façade. They also polish their image by formulating complaints against the young people's reprehensible behavior. Nevertheless, some strains of the previous tyrannical attitude begin to appear in the dialog. Lalo's tone, for instance, becomes increasingly imperious as he describes his disciplinarian method: "Tengo una mano de hierro y un látigo," immediately attenuated by, "Bueno, es un decir" (p. 42). Soon, he is trying to force Beba to drink chamomile tea: "Tómalo. . . . Quieras o no, te lo vas a tomar" (p. 43). The scene begins to take on a severity that forces Beba to try to abandon the playacting. Although Cuca manages to maintain dramatic order by drawing Beba's reluctance—and Lalo's exasperated reaction to it—into the game, this merely precipitates the introduction of the revenge element. The mother's series of complaints, instead of figuring as a triumph for the parental point of view, pave the way for her ultimate humiliation. After she asserts, regarding the children, "Hay que espiarlos, vigilarlos, estar siempre en acecho, porque son capaces de las mayores porquerías," Lalo emerges wearing a tattered veil. To ridicule his mother, he picks a scene on her wedding day that succinctly reveals character flaws: pretentiousness, hypocrisy, vanity. Lalo's impersonation of the mother walking down the aisle is also significant, for it entails a moment that marks the beginning of

the family, which seems doomed already. The portrayal of the pregnant bride aims to tear down the façade of maternal martyrdom. In fact, still before the imaginary visitors, the mother totally loses control and launches a vituperative attack against her son, spoiling the image of a household that functions well under firm but enlightened guidance.

In much the same way as each enacted scene culminates in a retributive passage, Lalo's description of the murder at the end of act one emerges as the ultimate assertion of the spirit of rebellion. The placement of the speech is as significant as its content. Involving the most violent revenge and positioned as punctuation, the report on the homicide provides an appropriately intense conclusion to a major dramatic section. The heightened tone of the passage arises through accumulation of details and through the tension between the horror of the topic and the impassiveness of the speaker. "¡Qué sencillo y terrible!" could describe the effect of the speech—perhaps of the whole drama game, as it closes the first part of the ritual (p. 51). Construction of a dramatic frame reaches completion with the last interchange between Beba and Cuca who bring us back to actual reality. They show a sharp awareness of the dramatic artifice of the preceding scenes; this underlines the calculation and manipulation involved in the development of dialog patterns, channels crafted for the release of frustrations.

In act two of La noche . . ., there occurs a continuation and elaboration of dialog patterns established in the first part. Parody accompanied by a retaliatory strain again help form the imaginative

segments. Being both offensive and defensive, each interchange allows for further criticism and vindication. Besides, since the specific content of scenes varies, important connections arise among different aspects of reenacted reality through shared verbal dynamics. This unifying factor carries out aesthetic and thematic functions, just like reiterated constructions and diction, as a closer look as imaginative segments in the second act will reveal.

The initial playacting sequence in act two originates forcefully when Beba yells, "La policía, la policía" (p. 62). Soon there ensues a parody of a police investigation. It contains the expected commands and questions, now colored by an aggressive disgust. The tone is highly reminiscent of the parents' inquisition of the children. Continuing a common form of verbal exchange, the interrogation—tainted by prejudgment—leaves little room for true response. Cuca and Beba here have the main voices as the two officers whose lines move from speculations to leading questions to accusations. Lalo merely inserts a few laconic statements of resistance and denial, with no elaborate defense. The dialog culminates in the typing of the police report, which excludes Lalo's voice altogether as the inhuman, mechanical sound presides over the damning process. Parallels with the public opinion sequences lie in the non-verbal elements (the ric-rac of the knives and the tic-tac of the typewriter) and in the movement from plural recriminatory voices to an insistent solo (from neighbors to newsboy, from investigators to typist). The process also involves going from informal condemnation to official accusation. Lalo's refusal to sign the confession, his strong

opposition to the investigative procedure, functions as an element of vindication as he finally gets to have his say against the system. The passage also acts as punctuation for the segment, including a clever transition into the trial scene. Thus, as should be the case with effective structural units, the second act's initial imaginative sequence contains ties with previous dramatic elements and sets the direction for their continued development.

The trial emerges as the culmination of the play's dialog patterns. Modes of communication previously contained in brief passages at a relatively intimate level now undergo expansion in the depiction of an institutional process. The first section in this long segment involves the lawyer's barrage against Lalo (pp. 76-82). This initiates the parody of the justice system, showing a devastating portrait of a representative individual, the pompous, incomprehensive, and often incomprehensible prosecuting attorney. In his speech there abound specious assertions, hollow rhetorical questions, and overwhelming accumulations of recriminatory details; swept by this verbal tidal wave, the accused has little chance to make a stand in his own defense. The prosecutor's aggressive words embrace and magnify all the characteristics of previous inquisitions. He becomes an inflated manifestation of the oppressive spirit shared by the mother, the father, the neighbors, and the police.

The second section of the trial scene allows for a more detailed presentation of Lalo's point of view. He begins by giving brief, factual answers that, though trivialized by the lawyer at first, progressively

acquire length and weight (p. 82ff). This leads to Lalo's elaborate description of the patricidal drive, relating its sweeping growth despite resistance (pp. 90-94). So far, the structure of the segment remains faithful to the established pattern: a parodic scene that permits condemnation of social phenomena moves towards retaliation through a vindictory section. However, the climactic force of Lalo's defense here causes a crisis in the ritual process. Laden with intensifying elements like accumulation and reiteration of details, the speech enrages Cuca. She feels her brother has been "playing dirty" and thus moves to introduce an absurd presence, the dead mother, who comes into the trial to counter the filial side. This shows the flexibility of the drama game. Set up as a release mechanism, the procedure does not need to adhere strictly to plausible realism in a situation as long as the characters can fully express themselves. Argumentative freedom, then, becomes a primary factor in the shaping of the dialog.

The trial scene undergoes lengthy extension as it moves from Lalo's defense to the mother's rebuttal and, finally, to the father's declarations on his own behalf. Just as the son's speech prompts Cuca to speak out as the mother, the latter's accusations and assertions elicit in Lalo a similar response; he counterattacks the mother by impersonating the father. The whole of Cuca's defensive speech meets with Lalo's assessment, "Ella miente, señor juez" (p. 101). There follows an attempt to clear the father somewhat, at the expense of the mother yet not without revealing some of his flaws, too. The

presentation takes the shape of a summary history of the couple's flawed relationship, often resorting to catalogues of complaints.

The impersonations of the parents arise as a manifestation of the siblings' own sympathies. Thus, Cuca expresses conformity with parental authority and resists her brother's rebelliousness. Lalo, although previously not drawn to the father's point of view, now portrays him with empathetic conviction, an antagonistic device to win in the verbal match. Beyond their argumentative function, these last impersonations serve to reemphasize secondarily basic parental feelings—the mother's vanity, the father's weak spirit—even as the characters tell their side of the story. This is in keeping with the tendency towards filial retaliation in the dialogs. In fact, despite the surface defense of each parent, the last playacting segment seems to work as the ultimate vindication of the children. Placed in relation to the whole play, as other passages that aim at vindication appear in the culmination of scenes, this concluding section gives the siblings—though indirectly—the last word. The final show of familial despair substantiates the children's dissatisfaction with the household situation.

Following dramatic logic, the last imaginative segment closes with Beba's impersonation of Lalo, a summary reaction to conflictive parental behavior. She gives a succinct recount of ways to deal with the oppressive surroundings, from the verbal game to complete destruction (pp. 108-109). This is in concordance with the basic pattern of dialogs which develop through exposition of negative circumstances and move towards emotional release. In tone and content, the speech provides the proper punctuation for the segment.

The concluding stretch of the play has the sisters coolly reflecting on the drama game while a shaken Lalo, now purged, wistfully entertains the hope of a solution through love. The sequence shows a double function. On the one hand, by harkening back to the playacting, it proclaims a satisfactory performance of the ritual and closes the dramatic frame begun in anticipation of the game. On the other hand, the concluding dialog points beyond the confines of the play's duration, towards a continued reenactment of the ritual. Thus, the important purposes of structural units are carried out: punctuation and projection. Presented as a clearly delineated entity, the drama achieves a complete identity; nevertheless, the ending perpetuates the world of the play in the imagination.

As essential elements of presentation, the dialog patterns help order significant words and phrases to give the play's different phases their shapes. This occurs in several ways. At the purely formal level, coherence and symmetry are served through placement and reiteration which draws the expressive interrelatedness of actual and imaginative planes. Specifically, the tension between playing and not playing manifested in the dialogs leads to, deviates from, and closes off the drama game. The related conflict between rebellion and conformity influences the role playing and extends itself throughout the reenacted scenes. Within the ritual, despite individual characteristics, the segments share a basic, developmental pattern, guided by parody and charged with personal yearnings to triumph over negative circumstances.

Beyond their formal role, dialog patterns have an important expository function. Special modes of expression—such as complaints,



accusations, questions—interwoven in representative verbal sequences—gossip, scoldings, trial procedures—come to portray characters and present situations, showing significant relations among different people and social phenomena. Moreover, the similarities shown through dialog patterns ultimately bear thematic implications. Deteriorated means of communication, appearing in all facets of society—from personal contacts to family to institutions—reveal most vividly the oppressiveness of a world that frustrates individual fulfillment. Denigrating interaction becomes especially insidious as it cuts across generations, with the most afflicted perpetuating misery—indeed a pessimistic statement.

#### Metatheatrical: A Macro-Structural Model

The examination of micro-structural elements in La noche de los asesinos revealed the moment to moment elaboration of dramatic shape at two levels. First there was the minute presence of significant words and phrases that help determine the verbal texture of the play. Special diction and reiterated phrases were seen to be interwoven, distinctly defining characters, situations, and themes. Then, also contributing to the presentation, the dialog patterns emerged embracing the word-phrase arrangements within a particular dynamic of interchange. Sequences were stamped with individual characteristics yet shared a general form. The dialog patterns thus achieved coherence—clear, interior definition of sequences—and direction—meaningful, unified progression. Of course, the study of these shaping elements had to

entail a wide enough focus to reveal relationships among different phrases—the continuum of segments—and facets—different characters, multiple situations—in the play. It is through the telling reoccurrence of similar micro-structural elements in various contexts, moreover, that thematic concerns are communicated in a dramatic work.

Although even a particularized analysis of dramatic structure gives a sense of the overall form of a play, there still remains the need to define the work according to its total construction and fundamental nature. To do this, it seems appropriate to use a term that identifies a special kind of genre. In the case of La noche . . ., "metadrama" serves as a fitting label. This represents a model that significantly matches the shape of Triana's play. Naturally, the term here does not just refer to a particular device—i.e., a play within a play—but to a comprehensive construct. To relate the model to La noche . . ., a clear definition of its nature is first in order.

In defining metadrama and testing its applicability, Lionel Abel's discussion in Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form<sup>8</sup> is particularly useful. A summary of Abel's observations in relation to characters, situations, themes, and essence best provides a basis for acquaintance with this special type of drama. Collation of his model with a specific work allows for the study of all aspects of a drama, from developmental devices to generative spirit. Of course, where elaboration seems germane, comments by other critics are to be brought in.

In his book, Abel sets out to define the nature of a "philosophic form of drama," etching out its characteristics with reference to

several major playwrights like Genet and Beckett. The fundamental philosophical tendencies of these plays mean that however prominently sociology or psychology might figure metaphysics remains the predominant concern. Beyond this basic assessment, Abel dedicates much time to analyzing the peculiarities of characters and situations in meta-theatre. He points out that the people who inhabit these plays from the very beginning appear inherently dramatic—made so by myth, legend, past literature, themselves.<sup>9</sup> This means that the characters possess a high degree of artifice; often they behave not so much in conformity with personality traits but rather according to histrionic concerns. Meta-theatre emerges as "the necessary form for dramatizing characters who, having full self-consciousness, cannot but participate in their own dramatization."<sup>10</sup>

Naturally, a special type of character leads to distinctive dramatic situations. Examining Beckett's plays, Abel remarks that the action there indicates some decisive antecedents.<sup>11</sup> The events unfolding before us seem to have been theatricalized by the mere passage of time. This contributes to the jelling of the dialog into set scenes, which suggest playacting more than mere routine. Thus, the action is endowed with a studied quality and frequently extended by reiteration. The presence of artifice, moreover, often creates fantastic elements, as hyperbole and metaphor gain dominance in the verbal and visual presentation. Abel especially notices this dramatic intensification in the works of Jean Genet.<sup>12</sup>

After having considered particular elements in metadrama, Abel summarily delineates its essential nature and form. Of greatest interest in his remark that in metatheatre the world becomes a projection of human consciousness, with reality being generated—by the imagination; "order is something continually improvised by men," states the critic.<sup>13</sup> It might be said that a work of metadrama in its totality emerges as a metaphor for the process of creation. This central image influences the shaping of events so that the play acquires "the breadth of simultaneity" rather than the "depth of succession."<sup>14</sup> Dramatic progression, in other words, is not linear; instead, it often develops through reiteration and association of scenes, multiplying episodic impressions. Thus, echoing, layering, and sequential linking of dramatic elements prevail over logical development. The result can be fascinating but frequently opaque, ultimately involving "admiratio," a feeling of wonder at the arcane or the extraordinary so common in Baroque art.

Bearing Abel's observations in mind, it is easy to see how La noche . . . fits into the tradition of metatheatre. Even critics who do not relate Triana's play in detail to this generic model still find metadramatic characteristics of one sort or another in the work. When Julio Ortega, for instance, asserts that the whole work "es un plan ajustado para asaltar el espectador,"<sup>15</sup> he is pointing towards its high degree of theatricality, the effort to amaze described by Abel. Moreover, Ortega comments that the play's characteristics "anunciaran que ésta es una pieza que se plantea como teatro dentro del teatro si esa fórmula no resultase ya exigua."<sup>16</sup> He thus fully recognizes the

relation to metatheatre; his reluctance thus to label the work, however, reflects an all-too-narrow definition of the tag term. Another commentator, Matías Montes Huidobro, also recalls an aspect of metatheatre when he states that La noche . . . gathers "secuencias episódicas, casi aisladas, donde los personajes juegan a representar." This points to the type of dramatic development described by Abel. When Montes Huidobro adds that "el juego nos parece que a veces perjudica la estructura,"<sup>17</sup> he is admitting to the mistake of evaluating the work outside the tenets of metatheatre, which call for emphatic incrementation and not linear progression of the drama.

Beyond these critics' passing remarks, we may evaluate La noche . . . according to Abel's model by considering dramatic elements individually. First, in terms of characters and situation the play adheres to the general qualities mentioned earlier. Events that precede the opening of the drama have already shaped the characters so that their behavior seems fixed; instead of personalities in formation, we witness the unveiling and constant exhibition of formed figures. Moreover, the three siblings demonstrate a dramatic flair from the start. Their psychology most clearly manifests itself in relation to the playacting. Through role playing, the brother and the two sisters dramatize themselves and representatives of their world, adding to their existence layers of artifice which nevertheless emanate from a core of desires and resentments. Indeed, as typical characters in metadrama, the siblings resort to histrionics as personal expression and to scenification as a mode of behavior.

Looking at events in La noche . . ., we note further similarities to the situations delineated by Abel. Beyond the decisive antecedents determining the action, the relation to metatheatres lies in the ensuing dramatic display that especially typifies the characters. As expected, rather than life in the making, we see the results of long unresolved conflicts, a set pattern of interaction. This has taken on a theatrical dimension as predetermined scenes in the drama game are played out. Representations of different aspects of the surrounding world become part of quotidian existence, and thus life comes to entail a series of acts that aim to transcend negative circumstances. The encroachment of fantasy upon everyday reality leads to the appearance of extraordinary elements—in the thunderous speeches, in the eccentric actions. Thus, language and manner seem especially crafted for special effects, emotional as well as aesthetic. Throughout powerfully moving efforts at revenge, release, and vindication, salient artistic devices, like intensifying images and catalogs, capture audiences.

Interestingly, Ann Murch, who has examined the process of ritual in Triana, compares him to Genet, whom Abel identifies as a writer of metatheatres.<sup>18</sup> Murch draws a relation between Les bonnes . . . and La noche . . ., especially pointing out how the action in both plays reflects "a fight for individual survival turned inward and enacted in ritual."<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, then, the ritual process becomes an end in itself, an established mode of behavior rather than a passage towards reintegration into society. Thus extended as a way of life, ritualism appears as a feature of metadrama, with its imaginative acts and attitudes creating a private reality.

La noche . . . also contains typically metatheatrical development. Characters and actions here are presented through set scenes, sometimes with only subjacent connections. This makes for episodic progression. Although the playacting proceeds from exposition, to crime, to the investigation, and finally to the trial (with accompanying interludes of discussion about the ritual game), moment-to-moment dramatic unfolding does not often involve linear development. Common to metadrama, the world before us is revealed obliquely through the frequent use of accentual devices. For instance, parallelism draws relations among characters and actions; reiteration of models of expression emphasizes social and psychological tendencies; chronological aberrations push realism aside for the sake of obsessional concerns. Encompassing these devices, the overall form of La noche . . . is generated through the interplay of two levels of reality—fitting in metadrama—the actual and the imaginary. The former introduces internecine struggles and provides some background; the latter entails the drama game, bringing in parody of circumstances in a purgative effort, while personalities are further delineated and conflicts extended. This serves principal dramatic purposes, if not always through a clear progression of events, then through a complex incrementation of metatheatrical impressions.

Considering the significant relation of Triana's play to Abel's model of metatheatre in terms of characters, situation, and overall construction, we should expect that the essence of the work will also fit the genre. In La noche . . ., the psychology of the characters may be captivating; their situation may demand sociological interpretation; their language may create powerful effects. Yet, encompassing and

shading the role of the individual, society, and aesthetics in the play, there appears a dominant philosophical stance—a view of the human condition that determines dramatic events. As is customary in meta-theatre, the role of the imagination in La noche . . . sends metaphysical signals. Given the adverse circumstances and limited possibility for solutions (which turn out to be either ineffectual or destructive), transcendence comes through an act of the imagination. Artifice here figures not only as a weapon against reality but as a replacement thereof. This emphasis on a dream world as a personal resource—already introduced in the poetry that precedes the text—unmistakably places Triana's play within the tradition of metatheatre.<sup>20</sup>

#### Comparative Structures: A System of Dramaturgy

The detailed analysis of El Mayor General hablará de teogonía and La noche de los asesinos, by embracing minute linguistic elements, the dynamics of dialog, and overall dramatic shape, provide a better understanding of each play's essential nature. The particular features of Triana's works, however, also lend themselves to comparison. Parallels in the elements of presentation indicate that, besides endowing a drama with its distinctive qualities, shaping units can provide a key to the playwright's general artistic principles. Given the importance of shared structural elements, then, it seems worthwhile to review the relation between the one-act and the full-length play. Here, we will deal with the reiterated use of shaping linguistic mechanisms and how these disclose fundamental thematic concerns. Having the playwright's general preoccupations and manner of elaboration more readily at our



disposal, we can begin to discern the underlying system of dramaturgy in his works. Hence, a study that started out with a microscopic focus will conclude with a panoramic view of the author's craft.

In looking over significant words and phrases in El Mayor General . . . and La noche . . ., we notice important common tendencies. Beyond their particular role within each work as building blocks of character, situation, atmosphere, and so forth, minute linguistic elements may be considered according to their general communicative nature. These can be thought of as representative of basic linguistic modes, predominant in both plays despite differences in emphasis and arrangement, thus, categories can be drawn up to relate shaping features that were examined individually. This method of classification allows us to take the first step towards discovery of a dramatic system in Triana.

The many series of significant words and constructions in both plays comprise three major groups of common microstructural elements. The descriptions of these divisions indicate the collective characteristics of the constituents. First of all, Triana's two plays contain sets of coercive and resistive elocutions; these include the frequent imperatives and interrogatives. Naturally, the verbal units in this mode have functions that are particular to each work. Commands in El Mayor General . . . might appear in preparation for the party or as resistance to the celebration; the same verb forms surface in La Noche . . . either to precipitate or to block the playacting. Questions arise as signs of resistance in one work and as part of parental oppression in the other. Yet, whatever their specific dramatic purpose, these

elements help establish flaws in the characters' relations and influence the irregular course of the dramas. In so far, then, as they contribute to the aggressive-defensive tenor of the dialog and accelerate or decelerate developments towards a particular direction, interrogative and imperative constructions in both works become part of the same presentational mode. As such, these locutions figure as an important point of contact between the one-act and the full-length play, stamping the dramas similarly with conflict and manipulation.

A second group of shaping elements includes all the special assertions and their attitudinal opposites, the negative, the reflective, and the incomplete statements. Affirmations, often somber or extreme, greatly determine the texture of El Mayor General . . . and La noche . . .—in the exasperated assessments of present conditions leading to radical proposals and in the obsession with the past. A variety of assertions, thus featured in protest and resolution, give background, describe actuality, and aim towards the future, unraveling thereby a chronological continuum in each play. Part of this process, of course, takes in statements that oppose rebellion. Personal stands that combat dissension make the rendering of reality more complicated, whether in conformist declarations or devaluating descriptions of dissident characters.

Adding to the complexity of the presentation, both plays contain shaping elements that, though related in scope to forceful assertions, emerge as their contrast. Expressions of doubt, hesitation, and inconclusive thoughts—not unlike the sharp complaints and strong

declarations—reveal psychologies in relation to the status quo. As indefinite expression takes the place of assertive language, dramatic details are vaguely conveyed and the characters, blurred amidst circumstances, become totally ineffectual. Characterization in both plays is further determined, then, by the emergence of negative constructions—in admissions of powerlessness or doubt—and truncated phrases—indications of confusion and a lack of resolve. When these expressive tendencies predominate, the resulting inhibition of discursive development makes for opaqueness in the dialog and the diminishment of the characters. Thus, negative and incomplete constructions become primary components of the play's disconcerting atmosphere.

Together, assertive and indeterminate statements, in contrasting manners, establish a basic structural mode in El Mayor General . . . and La noche . . .. This shaping presence with variant manifestations is responsible for exposition and projection in the plays. Through all the references to the past, assessments of the present, and declarations about the future—whether expressed with certainty or equivocally—the characters are set in their situation along a temporeal process. Shaping units in this mode help delineate psychologies in the context of problematical circumstances; conversely, reality is framed by the idiosyncracies of characters, a procedure that may be obsessively forceful or self-effacingly non-committal.

A third major group of shaping elements found in Triana's two plays is constituted by the intensive and reductive modes of the presentations. This would include the preponderant hyperbolic constructions and accumulations of descriptive details, on the one hand, and the

series of banalities—aphorisms, slang, conversational formulas—on the other. In each play, these micro-structural elements are employed to similar ends. For instance, the view of the household as a "labyrinth," with all the concomitant intensifying descriptions of stagnation and asphyxiation, contribute in both works to the rhetoric that supports violence. The mechanism of commonplace conversation or the facile wisdom of folk sayings conversely represents a tendency to reduce circumstances to manageable proportions. No matter what views these presentational elements give of reality—whether exacerbatedly intense depictions of oppression or palliative renditions of social exigencies—they actually serve to reveal just as much, if not more, about the speaker's state of mind. In general, the elaboration of the intensive and the reductive modes, beyond their roles in particular dramatic contexts, establishes rhetorical poles towards which expression may gravitate, affecting the tone of Triana's plays. The resulting heightening or deflating quality helps create overall tension. To varying degrees, contributing to or counteracting dissension, the intensive and the reductive modes charge the atmosphere, figuring in the presentation of opposite factions in the plays. The contradictory verbal dimensions that these modes respectively constitute endow each play with a complex stylistic tenor, by turns poetically abrasive and expediently prosaic: somberly Baroque embellishments accompany idiomatic simplicity. Hence, these forms of expression characterize the domestic situation, depicting family members and events that seem, at once, startlingly aberrant and recognizably commonplace.

Although the determinant diction and constructions shared by El Mayor General . . . and La noche . . . are more readily classified, the dialog patterns in the plays also provide ground for comparison. The types of interchange throughout the dramas vary in particular contexts yet show similar fundamental dynamics. To recapitulate, a dialectic around specific topics—household conditions, the party, the murder—lends shape to different phases in El Mayor General . . .; this tends to deteriorate as disjunctive tendencies predominate, leading from conflict to unbridgeable distancing. In La noche . . ., the interweaving of two realities determines the fabric of the dialog; the tension between urging and resisting the playacting dominates actuality, and imaginative sequences arise as parodies with a vindictive element. Despite the obviously more complex elaboration of dialog in the full-length play, both of Triana's works still show common characteristics that give coherence and direction to verbal interchange.

In looking at similarities in dialog patterns, we notice that the development of speaker relationships retains a basic likeness from one play to the other. The dialectic in El Mayor General . . . finds a parallel in the conflict over playacting that takes up much of La noche . . .. The opposition between Petronila and Elisiria fundamentally entails the pitting of conformity against rebelliousness, with ancillary participation by Higinio as he moves from one to the other stance. Similarly, Lalo takes up the dominant voice in the first act of La noche . . ., encouraging and directing the drama game while Cuca resists and Beba aids him; in the second act, Lalo and Cuca reverse

roles. Since the playacting represents a form of rebellion, the clashes it involves seem like a variant manifestation of the antagonism in the one-act. Conflict at the level of actual reality in La noche . . ., moreover, informs the parodic sequences; these entail a struggle between oppressors and their victims, once more a determinant of interchange that already figured in El Mayor General . . ..

Interestingly, both plays also contain a complementary feature—a special twist—that influences developments in the dialog. Discussions in El Mayor General . . . move through exposition of differences only to end up not in some sort of resolution but in complete deterioration of verbal contact. Equally, in La noche . . ., a distinctive element affects—at first unexpectedly, and then as part of an established pattern—the course of the presentation. There, the imaginative sections contain scenes from a denigrating world; these culminate with the introduction of some retaliatory event that modifies the rendering of reality, making parody a means of revenge. In their different ways, both the anti-dialectic process and the turns in parody make the dialog more complex. These elements, furthermore, help set the direction of dramatic phases and often constitute their climax. Thus, the complementary aspects of dialog patterns gain structural importance.

If to the similarities of verbal mechanisms in El mayor General . . . and La noche . . . one adds shared thematic preoccupations, both plays become even more closely related. The structural elements in them serve to present domestic dramas that show afflicted individuals caught up in limiting circumstances. Reconsidering the most elementary

source of structure—the speakers and their verbal acts—and given the likenesses among characters and their elocutions, we can see how basic shaping units come to elaborate comparable dramatic facets, revealing common themes. The reiterated words and phrases and the dialog patterns present the fundamental aspects of each drama—drawing characters, establishing their relationships, and placing them in situational contexts. These show a noteworthy relation between Triana's two works.

Speaking more exactly of the substance of El Mayor General . . . and La noche . . ., we note how the playwright populates his plays with eccentrics—obsessively malcontent or illusively conformist—driven to bizarre behavior. Specifically, a relation emerges between Lalo and Elisiria; their frustration and irascibility inform an aggressive rhetoric, branded by complaints and extreme proposals. Sharing a more defensive tone, Cuca and Petronila play the role of antagonists to the rebels; these women advocate adaptation to the domestic situation, similarly drawing up lines of resistance through contrapuntal comments—denials, warnings, doubts. As characters who become involved with conflicts that others establish, Beba and Higinio can identify with their companions' perspectives yet also abstain from complete commitment; thus, Beba aids the directors of the playacting but criticizes their constant bickering, and Higinio, by turns angry and resigned, fails either to rebel or to conform.

In view of the problematical psychologies of Triana's characters, it is not surprising that their relationships are stamped with conflict and manipulation. Contact constantly creates friction. Internecine

struggles charge the atmosphere and characterize dramatic phases. Beyond immediate tensions, a grim background and anxious projections gravely bear upon proceedings in both plays. Hyperbolic descriptions of a decrepit household, reports of humiliating encounters with power figures, and elaboration of violent scenarios are all interwoven, becoming part of the unfolding action. Burdensome grudges and desperate yearnings, then, contribute to conflict, helping to define the relationship among the characters through points of contention.

The shared structural elements in El Mayor General . . . and La noche . . ., conveying similar mentalities, interpersonal relations, and events, support our view of verbal constructs as the primary building blocks of drama. An analysis of significant words, phrases, and dialog patterns has led us beyond linguistic devices to a better understanding of the nature of characterization, plot, and thematic concerns in Triana's two works. Indeed, by looking at the formation of characters within their situational context, we may perceive the principal preoccupations of the playwright. The plays remain basically concerned with the denigration of individuals, held back from a full realization of their human potential. Hence, exposition of the factors that determine limiting circumstances and exploration of the characters' fate dominate the dramas. Conveyed forcefully through the presentational elements, the question of oppression—its psychological and social causes and manifestations—and of the chance for deliverance—through accommodation or drastic change—has primary importance in the formation of El Mayor General . . . and La noche . . .. As the stagnant



and troublesome worlds of these plays revolve, all the negative aspects of the problematical panorama—spiritual and social—are illuminated. Such a scenario makes movement towards personal liberation a difficult prospect. Doubt is cast on the effectiveness of quick, radical change and on the satisfaction of surrender. Only a vague hope for personal reedification (in Higinio's admission that limitations primarily arise from the individual) and for the purification of human relations (in Lalo's call for a familial restructuring based on love) remains as a flicker to light the way towards a more fortunate state. Finally, the open-ended structure of Triana's plays somberly signals the indefinite perpetuation of turmoil, completing the dramatic formulation of the playwright's dark assessment of individuals and their encompassing reality.

The process of structural analysis, from minute verbal units through dialog patterns to a general dramatic construct, illustrates the theoretical principles that inform our study. We have seen how linguistic features, with an ever-expanding range, give shape to plays through placement, interrelatedness, and development. Indeed, the structural mechanisms of El Mayor General . . . and La noche . . . provide concrete examples of the workings of form in progress—the stream of shapes that carries all dramatic aspects. This particular application of critical principles to two plays should further provide an approach to other works by Triana. The disassembling of presentational components, to discover their discrete linguistic qualities and the method of organization, can prove useful in the interpretation of complex plays, typical

of the author. Triana admits to a creative process that begins simply enough but moves towards intricacy. Speaking of La noche . . ., he asserts, "Lo primero que pensé fue en una familia, y entonces empecé a hacer un boceto en una forma muy naturalista de las relaciones familiares . . . en un ambiente lo más real posible"; then the author generalizes: "yo siempre cuando hago todas las piezas mías, ese es un trabajo preliminar que hago, en el cual me paso equis tiempo escribiendo, anotando, borrando . . . siempre partiendo de una cosa que podríamos llamar la realidad más desnuda de las cosas." However, passing the initial stages, the writer plunges into the often arcane elaboration that marks his works, a theater where "hay un juego siempre de realidad, imagen, o de algo imponderable."<sup>21</sup> The resulting complicated texture of the dramas can, then, be more easily apprehended through meticulous analysis, especially using the keys to structure—formative tendencies—gleaned from El Mayor General . . . and La noche . . .. Hence, our trajectory leads from dramatic minutiae to a total vision of the playwright's art.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>José Triana, La noche de los asesinos (Havana: Ediciones Casa de las Américas, 1965); all quotes from the play will refer to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>Matías Montes Huidobro, Persona, vida, y máscara en el teatro cubano (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1973), p. 420.

<sup>3</sup>See Anne C. Murch, "Genet-Triana-Kopit, Ritual as Danse Macabre," Modern Drama, No. 15 (March 1970), pp. 369-81.

<sup>4</sup>Beckerman, p. 175 ff., and Van Laan, p. 246 ff.

<sup>5</sup>See Campa, especially pp. 241-42, and pp. 286-88.

<sup>6</sup>See Campa, especially pp. 114-15, and pp. 118-119.

<sup>7</sup>Montes Huidobro, p. 420 and p. 426.

<sup>8</sup>Lionel Abel, Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 83 ff.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 76 ff.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>14</sup>This relates to the concept of intensive and extensive modes; see Beckerman, p. 188.

<sup>15</sup>Julio Orgega, "La noche de los asesinos," Cuadernos americanos, CLXIV, No. 3 (mayo-junio, 1969), p. 262.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>17</sup>Montes Huidobro, p. 414.

<sup>18</sup>Murch, pp. 369-71.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 375.

<sup>20</sup>The quotes from André Malraux and T. S. Eliot that appear in our edition of the text deal with alternatives to empirical reality—the dimension of dreams or the imagination.

<sup>21</sup>Abelardo Estorino, "Destruir los fantasmas, los mitos de las relaciones familiares: Entrevista a José Triana y Vicente Revuelta," Conjunto, II, No. 4 (agosto-septiembre, 1967), p. 7.

## APPENDIX

The following divisions indicate the names and the opening lines of segments in each play:

### El Mayor General hablará de teogonía:

- I. Entrapment: "Sí, ¿por qué pones esa cara?" (p. 319)
- II. Party Preparation: "¿Por qué lo invitaste?" (p. 322)
- III. First Reprise: "Maravillosa. . . . Como lo había soñado." (p. 333)
- IV. Murder Plan: "Ha llegado. Ha llegado." (p. 336)
- V. Memory: "¿Has oído?" (p. 343)
- VI. Second Reprise: "Luego. . . ." (p. 349)
- VII. Arrival: "El Mayor General." (p. 350)

### La noche de los asesinos:

- I. Initiation: "Cierra esa puerta." (p. 3)
- II. First Visit: "Oh, qué sorpresa." (p. 13)
- III. Polemic: "Eres una calamidad." (p. 19)
- IV. Public View: "¿Sabes una cosa, Cacha?" (p. 31)
- V. Murder: "Lalo, ¿qué estás haciendo?" (p. 36)
- VI. Reinitiation: "Míralo." (p. 55)
- VII. Investigation: "La policía, la policía." (p. 62)
- VIII. Confession: "En el local de esta Estación de Policía, y siendo. . . ." (p. 72)

IX. Lalo at the Trial: "Si el señor juez me permite. . . ."  
(p. 76)

X. Parents at the Trial: "Sargento de Carpeta, perdone Ud.  
mi atrevimiento." (p. 94)

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1951. Nine years later he came to live in the United States. In 1974, he graduated from the University of Florida with an M.A. in English and, afterwards, earned another master's degree in Spanish before going on to his doctoral studies. At present, he is an instructor at the Language Institute of Miami-Dade Community College, New World Center Campus. Besides pursuing a teaching career, the author also writes regularly on theater and other performing arts.

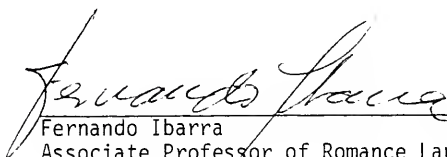
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Ivan A. Schulman, Chairman  
Graduate Research Professor of Latin  
American Studies

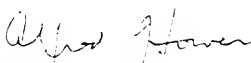
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Fernando Ibarra  
Associate Professor of Romance Languages  
and Literatures

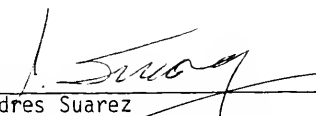
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Alfred Hower  
Professor of Romance Languages  
and Literatures

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

  
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Andres Suarez  
Professor of Latin American Studies

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council, and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 1983

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Dean for Graduate Studies and Research

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA



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